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THE ARMY VS. THE PEOPLE:
THE OPPOSITION OF THE SOVIET MILITARY
TO BALTIC INDEPENDENCE

A MASTER'S ESSAY SUBMITTED TO
THE CENTER FOR RUSSIAN AND EAST
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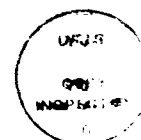
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

So, you're not a part of the USSR? Well, if that is recognized as such, then we will discuss it.... Right now Lithuania is a part of the Baltic Military District.¹

On January 13, 1990 Soviet, troops attacked the main television station in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. Their mission was to wrest control of the TV station away from the small group of lightly-armed nationalist volunteers who had barricaded themselves inside in order to resist Soviet attempts to seize the station. The scene was reminiscent of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Tanks plowed through groups of protesters, rolling over and killing individual protesters caught under the treads. Groups of Lithuanian women surrounded

¹ Soviet Defense Minister D. Yazov addressing Sajudis leader V. Landsbergis at a meeting of military and civilian leaders in December 1989. Unattributed, "Litva i Armia-V Poiske Tochek Soprikosnovenia" [Lithuania and the Army-The Search for Points of Contact], *Sovetskaya Litva*, December 16, 1989. The candor and hostility of the exchanges during this meeting, and the fact that they were so openly reported in the official press, reflect the military's attempt to reclaim the initiative in the propaganda battle. The intent may have been to portray the Lithuanians as anti-military extremists, and the high command as moderates.

the tanks, yelling at the soldiers and calling them names. When the women called the soldiers "fascists", the soldiers beat them with the butts of their rifles.²

This violent confrontation is only one of the more recent instances in which uniformed Soviet military or police forces have been used to intimidate Baltic³ separatists and to challenge their control over key governmental facilities and functions. The Soviet central government in Moscow has several tools at its disposal to deal with challenges to Kremlin authority. Foremost among these are the paramilitary police forces of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) and the KGB. Nevertheless, the Soviet Armed Forces⁴ are strongly represented

²*New York Times*, January 14, 1991.

³The term "Baltic" refers to the three Soviet Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia taken collectively, except where it is clearly used as a purely geographical term. Likewise "Balts" refers to the citizens of these three republics. In my analysis, I have chosen to treat these three republics as one entity, deemphasizing the differences between them. While there are obvious pitfalls in this approach, I have treated the republics in the fashion most often adopted by the Soviet military itself. These three republics are grouped into one military entity, the Baltic Military District [Pribaltiskiy Voennyi Okrug]. The republics are most often referred to collectively as "the Baltic" [Pribaltika], and observations made about one of the republics are often generalized to represent events in the region as a whole.

⁴The Soviet Armed Forces consists of the Ground Forces, Navy, Air Forces, Air Defense Forces, and Strategic Rocket Forces. They are oriented on defending the USSR against all external threats to Soviet security. The police units of the MVD, KGB and local militias, while they wear military uniforms

in the Baltic region. The Baltic Military District, located as it is on the Western frontier of the Soviet state and on the coast of the Baltic Sea, is one of the most militarized areas in the USSR. In addition to ground, air and air defense forces, the district is also home to the Baltic Fleet. Ultimately, the Kremlin must rely on the regular armed forces to maintain political and strategic control over this vital region.

Does this mean that the Soviet military establishment is a passive participant and indifferent instrument in the central government's efforts to maintain its authority in the Baltic? Or is it possible that the Soviet military has its own agenda which conditions its participation in these efforts? There is a long debate over the influence of the military on politics in the Soviet Union. The nature of the Baltic challenges to Kremlin authority, however, leaves little doubt that the military^a firmly supports the central civilian leadership in its attempts to restore its authority and maintain its control

and are often equipped like the Ground Forces, are not, strictly speaking, military forces. They are primarily forces for *internal* order.

^aIn using the term "military", I do not propose that the Soviet military establishment is a monolithic organization in which there are no differences of opinion on policy. Cleavages are apparent, for example, between the generations of Soviet officers: junior and mid-grade officers have espoused support for reforms that the senior generals reject out of hand. I use the term "military" primarily in reference to the Soviet General Staff and the senior commanders. It is these senior officers that still wield the power and influence of the military, and perhaps more importantly, view themselves as the guardians of the military's role and place in Soviet society.

over the separatist republics. Moreover, the Baltic independence drives represent a direct and unambiguous challenge not only to central authority in general, but also to the institutional interests of the military in particular. Far from simply being supporters of central policies to maintain control over the Baltic, members of the military have become forceful advocates for actions to restore law and order and to compel obedience to Soviet authority. This has resulted in a tense and hostile standoff between the Soviet military and the local Baltic populations and governments.

Background

Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms were aimed at undermining the strength of those forces which opposed changing the old system of administering the Soviet economy and society. The catch-all word "*perestroika*" was used to describe all of those actions intended to introduce greater efficiency and effectiveness into the Soviet economy, especially the marketization of economic relations. In order to make his program work, Gorbachev needed to rely on support from many sectors of society and break the resistance of the party apparatchiks who stood to lose the most power, influence and prestige should the reforms be successful. "*Glasnost*", or "openness", was wielded as a tool to weaken obstructionist forces (the bureaucracy) by exposing them to unprecedented criticism. The "New Thinking" (*Novoe Myshlenie*)

in foreign policy reduced the influence of the military-industrial complex by effectively reducing the potential external threat to Soviet security, thereby removing the primary justification for the high priority usually given to military expenditures. The results of Gorbachev's reform efforts are too complex to explore here. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the attempt to undermine the strength of those opposed to reform has been successful. Conservatives, including many in the military, became ardent supporters and proponents (publicly, at least) of *perestroika*, although they tended to interpret the reforms to fit their own agendas. The most pronounced effect of Gorbachev's reforms, especially *glasnost*, was to embolden those who desperately wanted change. Foremost among these were the nationalists in the non-Russian republics of the USSR.

The Baltic republics were fertile ground for Gorbachev's calls for decentralization, economic renewal and openness. By mid-1988 all three republics had given birth to broadly-based popular front movements which agitated for change⁶. The programs of these movements might best be described as demands for "radical autonomy". While there was an emphasis on establishing as much local, republican control over the life of the people as possible, only the most extreme activists called for complete independence. On the whole, in the early stages,

⁶For a good treatment of the Baltic independence movements from 1986-1989, see Rein Taagepera, "Estonia's Road to Independence," *Problems of Communism*, (November-December 1989), 11-26.

the popular front movements were quite moderate, concentrating on restoring cultural autonomy (national languages as official languages, legalization of national flags, etc.), and economic autonomy. The national communist parties in the three republics were at first unreceptive, but under continued pressure from Moscow and the popular fronts, began to see the need for change. The elections to the new Soviet Congress of People's deputies in March of 1989 further reduced the influence of old-guard party bureaucrats, split the parties into pro and anti-reform factions, and gave the Baltic Communist parties an increasingly nationalist character.

The Baltic Communist parties tried to walk a "middle road" between the complete independence and continued domination by Moscow. Yet according to conservatives, including a majority of the senior officers in the military, the Communist parties in the Baltic republics were making demands that were completely unacceptable. For example, in the area of military policy, the Baltic CP's supported and pushed popular demands for stationing Baltic conscripts only in the Baltic Military District or, at least only in the "European" part of the USSR. This was a direct challenge to the principle of "extra-territoriality" in stationing of Soviet troops. For the military, it also reflected an unacceptable civilian intrusion into military affairs. The Baltic CP's sought to gain legitimacy by addressing the genuine aspirations of their peoples while avoiding the calls for a complete break with Moscow. There is

some evidence that this approach might have been successful under different conditions. On January 15, 1989, Algirdas Brazauskas, the chief of the Communist Party of Lithuania, was elected by an overwhelming majority of the republic's legislature to be President of Lithuania. Whatever potential there was, however, for the Baltic republics to walk the middle road was overcome by events. The political forces unleashed by Mikhail Gorbachev in order to support his program of radical reform evidently went much further than he could have intended.

On February 13, 1990 the Central Committee of the CPSU, led by Gorbachev, announced that it would support a renewed political structure for the Soviet state. The revised policies called for a national government based on an electoral system allowing political parties, abandoning the monopoly of the Communist Party, and instituting a head of state responsible to the Congress of Deputies. The repudiation of the Communist party's statutory "leading role" in Soviet society, formally adopted a month later, set in motion a chain of events in the Baltic States resulting in a crisis of legitimacy and authority for Soviet power. On February 25, 1990, Lithuania elected its first post-war non-Communist government. On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence. Estonia and Latvia followed with their own independence declarations in the following months. The break-up of the Soviet empire seemed a definite possibility.

From a political standpoint, the most remarkable aspect of the change of governments in the Baltic republics was the polarization of power. This was reflected by the shift in political elites which accompanied the change. The pro-Moscow loyalist party leaders, who had been gradually been losing influence anyway, found themselves out of the government, except for some representation in the local legislatures. Despite their popularity, the nationalist party leaders, like Brazauskas in Lithuania, were swept away in the nationalist tide. The cultural and intellectual elite, which, by and large, had been in the forefront of the popular front movements, now held the reins of power. This latter group, represented by people like Vytautas Landsbergis, the new President of Lithuania, were (and are) ardently in favor of complete independence from Moscow. The middle road (radical autonomy within a loose Soviet federation), if it ever was a viable solution, was abandoned in favor of maximalist demands for independence and the withdrawal of all Soviet troops. The nationalist-separatist governments of the Baltic republics recognized that the military forces of the Soviet Union, whether MVD, KGB, or regular forces, were Moscow's only credible means for keeping the Balts from seceding.

Army vs. the People

The Soviet Armed Forces found themselves in the position of being the only organized and powerful representative of central

authority in the Baltic region. The "internal role" of the Soviet Armed Forces in making the continued subjugation of the Baltic republics possible had always been hidden behind a mass of complex political-military relationships. Party leaders held posts on military councils, and military officers were often members of local party organizations⁷. In this way, the party could coordinate the military's role in the region without giving military officers an explicit political role. The assumption of power by separatist governments removed the civilian communists from power, but left the military institutions untouched. General Fyodor Kuz'min, the commander of the Baltic Military District became Gorbachev's de facto "Military Governor", the only powerful and loyal representative of Moscow's authority in the Baltic region. The internal role of the armed forces was therefore exposed. Moscow was relying on the military to rule a small, but significant part of the empire.

For Baltic nationalists, this turn of events just exposed what they had always claimed: that the Soviet Army is an occupation army in the service of a "foreign power". Undermining the power of the military through draft evasion, the

⁷For example, the Latvian CP chief was a regular member of the Military Council (Voensoviet) of the Baltic Military District (BMD), headquartered in Riga, and the BMD commanders regularly sat on the Central Committee of the Latvian CP. Similar relationships at the district and city level were prevalent in Lithuania and Estonia. See Andris Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area* (Stockholm: Lettiska Nationella Fonden, 1986), 41.

formation of local militia units and the continued vilification of non-Baltic servicemen became the order of the day. The military found itself on the defensive, unalterably opposed to Baltic independence, but wounded and troubled by the criticism accompanying its now openly-visible role as policeman of the empire. Soviet military opposition to Baltic independence, however, does not have its roots in the present period of political reform. The conflict between the Army and the Baltic people, vividly demonstrated by the attack on the Vilnius TV tower in January 1991, dates back to the first imposition of Soviet control over the Baltic region in 1939.

Goals of the Study

This paper will explore the sources of Soviet military opposition to Baltic independence. It will try to show that military support for the continuation of central authority in the Baltic states is based, at least in part, on the fact that the Baltic independence drives are direct challenges to Soviet military institutional interests.* It will attempt to answer

*In making this argument, I am operating according to the hypothesis that in the absence of such strong institutional interests, the military would be more indifferent to the fate of the Baltic republics. It is difficult to find a case to test this hypothesis, because the military's interests seem to be challenged anywhere there are moves towards separatism. The case of the Baltic republics is a clear and unambiguous challenge, in part at least, because of the region's obvious

these questions: Why does the Soviet military view Baltic independence as strategically dangerous and unacceptable? Why does the military establishment view the separatist demands of the Baltic peoples as an attack on its prestige, role in Soviet society, and even its very existence? Which military prerogatives and material interests are put at risk by the achievement of independence by the Baltic republics? Finally, this paper will attempt to suggest how the Soviet military's perceptions of its interests in the Baltic might affect the possibility of future independence for the Baltic States.

strategic significance (See Chapter II). It would be interesting to test this hypothesis by comparing the stand of the military in a separatist republic with less strategic importance (perhaps Soviet Georgia), and see if there are significant differences in the way the military relates to the drives for independence there.

CHAPTER II

SOVIET STRATEGIC CONCERNS IN THE BALTIC

As the institution in Soviet society with direct responsibility for safeguarding the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union, it is natural that the Soviet military is unalterably opposed to the notion of independence for the Baltic republics. The issue of Baltic independence is primarily a political one, involving questions of the legitimacy of the Soviet state, and the proper relationship between the center and the periphery. The strategic significance of the Baltic region, however, has highlighted Soviet security concerns and legitimized the entry of the military establishment into the debate.

Soviet military authorities view the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Soviet state within its present borders as a given. There are no serious discussions in the official Soviet military press suggesting that the secession of republics from the Union could in any way be acceptable. The representatives of political groups calling for independence from the Soviet Union are singled out for unremitting criticism and even mockery. While it is possible to attribute Soviet military objections to the idea of secession to "blind conservatism", i.e. the refusal to consider any fundamental

changes in the structure of power relationships within society¹, it is also possible to point to more concrete concerns. Soviet military leaders, along with other conservative forces in Soviet society, are probably convinced that to give in to any single republic's demands for complete independence would start a stampede among other like-minded republics, ending in the total dissolution of the Soviet state. The military, the KGB, and the Communist Party would be the big losers in any radical breakup of the USSR. An implied task of any large bureaucratic organization is to safeguard its role, budget and influence; therefore the preservation of the Soviet Union is absolutely essential to the continued existence of the organs of central power.

Strategic Importance of the Baltic

In the case of the Baltic States, however, Soviet military concerns are based on more than just general concerns about the political viability of the USSR; they are based on genuine concerns for the national security of the Soviet Union. The flare-up of ethnic unrest in the Baltic States during the last few years has prompted several spokesmen to state,

¹ S. Enders Wimbush, ed., *Soviet Nationalities in Strategic Perspective* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 30.

unequivocally, the determination of the Soviet government, and specifically, the Soviet Armed Forces, to hold on to the Baltic region:

The strategic position that Latvia holds and the armed forces concentrated on the republic's territory are important elements of the Soviet doctrine in Europe. It is quite obvious that the Soviet Union will never give up its own security and territorial integrity.²

Senior military leaders have confirmed that, in their view, the Soviet Union has "vital strategic and economic interests" in the Baltic region, chief among which is maintaining an outlet to the Baltic sea.³ Loss of the Baltic ports due to the German occupation of the Baltic States during World War II (1941-1944), forced the Soviets to rely on the northern ports in the Kola inlet and Murmansk for resupply. A possible future Soviet/NATO confrontation would make that solution almost completely unworkable.

Secession of any of the Baltic States, in the military view, would endanger existing security arrangements not only for the Baltic region, but also for the entire Soviet Union and Europe as well. Soviet command and control, air and coastal defenses, and shipping would all be disrupted. The Baltic Military District, the regional command for the majority of land

²FBIS, Daily Report, no. 42, (March 6, 1989), 78. This statement was made by conservative commentator Aleksandr Chudakov in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, March 3, 1989.

³Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (December 20, 1990). This comment was made by Colonel-General Albert Makashov.

based units in the Baltic, is located at the convergence of two main theaters of military operations (Teatry Voennikh Destvii or TVD's) - - the Northwestern (including Scandinavia and adjacent waters) and the Western (including the central region of Europe). In wartime, success in these two theaters as well as in the Arctic Oceanic TVD will hinge on the successful conduct of operations in the Baltic Military District area of operations.

Spokesmen for the separatist governments of the Baltic states have expressed the belief that the primary motivation for Soviet rejection of Baltic independence is to "keep the territory at any price, so that they can legitimize Soviet military forces in the Baltic."⁴ Baltic leaders, however, often seem to suggest that Soviet authorities are solely motivated by a desire to deprive the republics of their independence, and subsequently denigrate genuine Soviet security concerns. A careful reading of Soviet military writings reveals a complex set of strategic and operational reasons which explain why the Soviet military sees control of the Baltic region as crucial for the maintenance of Soviet national security. Soviet articles dealing with the controversies over the establishment of national-territorial militias (republican armies), the failure of young men to report for the draft, and the so-called

⁴Joshua Spero, "Meeting with Estonian Security Specialists", Memorandum for Record, November 13, 1990. Soviet Army Studies Office Net.

"anti-army campaign" provide useful insights into the arguments used by the military to justify their opposition to Baltic independence on strategic grounds.

Legacy of the Interwar Period

Many Soviet military writers view the strategic conditions faced by the USSR today as analogous to the ones which prevailed during the interwar period (1921-1941).⁵ That period was characterized by a weakened, but resurgent Germany bordered in the East by a number of unstable successor states which were backed up by Western imperialist countries seeking to maintain the post-Versailles status-quo. The Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, the rise of non-communist governments in the former nations of the Warsaw pact, and the absence of a continent-wide collective security framework have confronted the Soviet Union with strategic dilemmas reminiscent of the interwar period. A Soviet worst-case threat scenario probably envisions a NATO-free Europe with bilateral defense agreements between the U.S., Great Britain, and France, and a unified, militarized revisionist

⁵See for example, R.A. Savushkin, *Razvitie Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil i Voennogo Iskustva v Mezhoennyi Period (1921-1941)* [The Development of the Soviet Armed Forces and Military Art in the Interwar Period (1941-1921)] (Moscow: Lenin Military-Political Academy, 1989), 4-5. The parallels with the interwar period are being reflected in doctrinal work by a number of Soviet military theorists.

Germany competing with the Soviet Union for control of Eastern Europe. Some commentators even forewarn of the beginning of another "Drang nach Osten":

By the end of the 20th Century central Europe will see the rise of a German industrial giant, filled with energy, inspired by Pan-germanic ideals, its gravitational influence pulling in the former German lands.⁶

Included, of course, under the phrase "former German lands" are the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs).

During the interwar period, the Baltic region was significant primarily as an arena of competition between the Soviet Union and its two major regional competitors: Poland (from 1920-1933) and Germany (from 1933-39). The Western powers, especially France, attempted to use the Eastern European states to erect a "Cordon Sanitaire", designed to contain Bolshevik Russia. Poland and the Baltic States played a prominent role in anchoring this barrier to the Baltic Sea in the North. Poland, however, in addition to being "France's watchman in Europe" (Molotov's phrase), was also trying to carve out a role for itself as regional power in the Baltic region. In 1928, accusing Poland of trying to turn Lithuania into a "semi-colony", the Communist International issued a statement linking Poland's ambitions with Western imperialist support:

⁶Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Tragedia Tsentralizatsii," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, no. 1, (January 5, 1990), 4-5. Quoted in Jacob Kipp, "The Russian Military and the Right: A Paradox of the Politization of the Soviet Armed Forces under Glasnost and Perestroika," unpublished paper, Soviet Army Studies Office, 1990.

This is demanded by the interests of imperialist Britain and France, who are trying to build a united front against the Soviet Union from the *Baltic to the Black Sea*.⁷

The Baltic States themselves attempted to establish alliances with all of the countries of East Central Europe and Scandinavia at one time or another. Attempts to establish their neutrality in ties with Finland, Sweden and Norway foundered on the Scandinavian reluctance to become entangled in disputes between the Soviet Union and Germany. The Baltic States eagerly participated in several conferences designed to establish a security framework throughout Eastern Europe including Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania, but Soviet objections and diplomacy prevented these plans from coming to fruition. The only purely Baltic defensive agreement to result from the various attempts at unity was the Latvian-Estonian Entente of 1923. It is indicative of the deep-seated Soviet fear of hostile alliances, that despite the purely defensive nature of this agreement, the Bolsheviki branded it as anti-soviet. The Soviet Foreign Minister, George Chicherin, complained:

These attempts to form combinations of border states will never solve the problem of their healthy development, which can come about only through friendly economic and political agreement with Russia.⁸

Despite the frequent attacks on the Baltic States for

⁷Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents*, vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 421-422.

⁸Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass, 1951), 420-421.

trying to form alliances with other Eastern Europe states against the USSR, Soviet military and political leaders did not consider the three small Baltic states a direct threat to Soviet security. Rather it was the spectre of the Baltic region being used by the West as a springboard for aggression against the USSR that haunted the Soviet leadership. The Russians had no delusions regarding Baltic sympathies. George Chicherin said in 1924:

...our nearest neighbors in the west have always been subject to the influence of western diplomacy, taking a hostile line towards us...We hope that the Baltic states will...not enter into the orbit of the western powers [nor] participate in the plan to encircle us.⁹

Soviet concerns about the vulnerability of the region only intensified in 1933, when a resurgent Germany effectively replaced Poland as the Soviet Union's dominant rival in the region.

In 1940 the Soviet leadership considered the inclusion of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union an essential geopolitical measure to secure the Baltic Coast against potential German and Western penetration and to close off traditional invasion routes from that direction.¹⁰ Soviet possession of the Baltic States, however, did not provide much security. During the invasion of Summer 1941, the Germans quickly overran Soviet defenses amid mass defections and

⁹*Ibid.*, 467.

¹⁰ Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities*, 83.

desertions of Baltic troops. After WWII, partisan warfare raged on in the region's forests as late as 1953.¹¹ During the early years of the Cold War the West (primarily the U.S. and Great Britain) financed efforts to provide Baltic emigres with sustained communication with their co-nationals in the USSR, including the partisans. To this day, soldiers of the Baltic Border Guard District consider emigres supported by Western intelligence to be their major external threat.¹²

Soviet central authorities continue to view the Baltic as a strategically vulnerable region, primarily because of the local population's cultural affinity for the West. The Baltic States and the western Ukraine have deep historical, cultural and political ties with western Europe. The commercial role of the Baltic peoples in northern Europe made them an integral part of the European community, with exceptionally strong ties to Scandinavia.¹³ The Balts have retained a sense of cultural and social uniqueness that has given their region the nickname of "sovietskaya zagranitsa" (soviet foreign country.)¹⁴ The proximity of the Baltic States to Poland and the prosperous

¹¹ Roumald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Independence, 1940-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 90-91.

¹² Andris Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area* (Stockholm: Lettiska Nationella Fonden, 1986), 54.

¹³ Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities*, 83.

¹⁴ Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area*, 10.

states of the capitalist west has been a continuous source of anxiety for Soviet strategists. The Baltics have been traditionally considered to be "ideologically soft", and therefore unreliable. Recent events in Eastern Europe and the even more recent unrest in the Baltic republics have confirmed in the mind of Soviet planners that foreign support for ethnic unrest in the Soviet Union is a very real threat.¹⁵ Moreover, the separatist demands of the Baltic peoples have confronted the Soviet Union once again with the prospect of having hostile states under the influence of the west located on a critical frontier.

The diplomatic activities of the independent Baltic governments in the last few months have provided the Soviet central leadership with evidence that their worst fears are probably well-founded. In September 1990 peoples' deputies from the Baltic States, Belorussia and the Ukraine met to discuss the formation of a "*Baltic to Black Sea Union*" as a state entity. This union would be based on the rejection of a unified USSR, the withdrawal of all Soviet forces from the region, and the creation of a common market among the five republics.¹⁶ The similarity of this proposal to efforts of East European states

¹⁵ David Glantz, "Future Soviet Military Strategy," (unpublished, Soviet Army Studies Office, 1990). See also S. Turchenko, "Sluzhba v Pribaltike" [Service in the Baltic], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 30, 1990, for emphasis on the continued external threat from NATO.

¹⁶ Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (September 23, 1990).

to form such unions in the interwar period is striking, and its significance was not lost on critics of Baltic independence. Colonel Victor Alksnis, one of the leaders of the rightist *Soyuz* faction in the Supreme Soviet, wasted no time in criticizing the western republics for entering into such talks and immediately accused the deputies of having colluded with an American CIA agent during the talks in Minsk.¹⁷ Although Soviet central authorities probably realize that Alksnis' accusations are groundless, they cannot help but be anxious about the implications of this attempt to set up an anti-Soviet bloc along their entire western frontier.

Operational Importance of the Baltic

The loss of the Baltic States is unthinkable for a Soviet strategist. Just as in the interwar years, a Baltic region in the hands of independent states outside Soviet control would leave the USSR vulnerable to penetration and attack by the West. The Baltic governments cannot be trusted to refrain from collusion with western governments and intelligence services. American and NATO professions of support for Baltic independence are viewed by senior Soviet military officials as proof of

¹⁷ *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*. November 20, 1990.

western designs in the region.¹⁸ In addition, recent articles in the military press have emphasized that the NATO threat to the security of the region is still very real.¹⁹ Aside from the geopolitical realities which make Baltic independence unacceptable to the Soviets, there are also sound reasons, grounded in Soviet military doctrine, which make the retention of the Baltic region a military necessity in Soviet eyes.

The loss of the Baltic states would be disastrous not only from a strategic standpoint, but from an operational and tactical one as well. The Soviet military is foremost a warfighting organization. Soviet military doctrine provides the political-military basis upon which to plan strategy for warfighting operations. While the Soviet military has been moving in recent years towards a more defensive military strategy, strategists maintain that offensive operations will still be necessary. Based on the security needs of the Soviet Union and the requirements of military doctrine and military science, professional military officers consider control of the Baltic States essential for conducting offensive and defensive operations in north central Europe.

¹⁸ Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (September 28, 1990). Marshal Akhromeyev warned that the US still threatens Soviet security and highlighted the continued American support for Baltic autonomy as ominous.

¹⁹ S. Turchenko, "Sluzhba v Pribaltike" [Service in the Baltic], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 30, 1990.

Ever since the early 1980's, Soviet military officials have given greater emphasis to the defensive aspects of military doctrine, strategy, and operational art. This trend has intensified since Gorbachev came to power and stressed his New Thinking in Soviet foreign policy. The large-scale withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, however, has heightened Soviet General Staff concerns about the USSR's ability to defend its borders. The Soviet possession of a formidable nuclear arsenal would seem to suggest that Soviet concerns about border defense are exaggerated. The General Staff, however, remains generally unconvinced of the conventional war deterring capability of nuclear weapons and sees its security against aggression guaranteed by its conventional military strength.²⁰ Soviet forces are deployed as though most conflicts are expected along their borders. The USSR maintains the world's most extensive system of coastal defenses, anti-aircraft defenses, and border troops (separate from the regular armed forces.)²¹

Soviet forces have traditionally been organized to defend in echelons. Before the withdrawal of forces from Eastern Europe, forward Groups of Forces in the Warsaw Pact countries comprised the first strategic echelons for defense of the Soviet

²⁰Stephen R. Covington, "Soviet Security Reform: Implications for NATO's Transformation in the 90's," unpublished paper, Soviet Army Studies Office, 1990.

²¹Henry S. Rowen and Charles Wolf Jr., *The Future of the Soviet Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 151.

Union in case of a conflict in Europe. Other Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces arrayed in greater depth made up the second echelon, and the forces deployed in the border military districts (Baltic, Belorussian, Carpathian and Odessan) made up the third echelon. This deployment provided a deep buffer zone with which to absorb and repel an enemy attack.

The loss of forward positions and non-Soviet Warsaw Pact troops, in connection with the breakup of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) has forced the Soviet military to adopt a "bastion" defense strategy, similar to that adopted prior to WWII.²² The importance of the border military districts, including the Baltic, is greatly increased in this strategy. Troops deployed in the border districts now comprise the first strategic echelon. The mission of the units in this echelon, in the event of an enemy attack, would be to conduct defensive operations independently and without reinforcement, to prevent the enemy from penetrating, and to create the conditions for operations to destroy him.²³ The post-1945 straightening of the Soviet border created favorable conditions for a future defense of the Soviet Union. Given the importance of the border military districts to a successful defense, the loss of the

²²This paragraph based largely on David M. Glantz, "Future Soviet Strategic Posture," (unpublished, Soviet Army Studies Office, August 1990).

²³David M. Glantz, "The Soviet View of Future War," (unpublished, Soviet Army Studies Office, August 1990).

Baltic States, Belorussia, the Ukraine or Bessarabia (Moldavia) would seriously jeopardize Soviet western strategic defenses.²⁴

Despite the recent emphasis on defensive doctrine and strategy, Soviet military officers continue to believe that victory in war can only be achieved through offensive operations. This belief is grounded in Soviet experiences in WWII.²⁵ The ability to launch offensive operations from forward positions is essential to keep from fighting on your own territory, and even a purely defensive strategy must include the ability to launch vigorous counteroffensives.²⁶ Traditionally, the wartime mission of military forces stationed in the Baltic area has been to seize the Baltic approaches (Danish straits), permitting Baltic Fleet naval forces to break out into the Atlantic, link up with the Northern Fleet and close off the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap. Having accomplished this, Soviet assault forces would be in a position to conduct flanking

²⁴David M. Glantz, "Future Soviet Strategic Posture," (unpublished, Soviet Army Studies Office, August 1990).

²⁵Richard Ned Lebow, "The Soviet Offensive in Europe: The Schlieffen Plan Revisited?" in *Soviet Military Policy: An International Security Reader*, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and others, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 320. (Hereafter, *Soviet Military Policy...*).

²⁶Jack Snyder, "The Gorbachev Revolution: A Waning of Soviet Expansionism?" in Lynn-Jones, *Soviet Military Policy...*, 100.

attacks against NATO forces in the central region.²⁷ One indication of the Soviet readiness to accomplish this mission is the fact that prior to the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, 50% of Warsaw Pact amphibious warfare capability was concentrated in the Baltic region.²⁸ While Soviet offensive strategies in the Baltic in the event of a future conflict with the West in Europe have most likely been made less ambitious, it is clear that control of the Baltic littoral is essential for the conduct of any offensive operations in northern Europe.

In addition to the loss of strategically critical territory and base facilities, the Baltic economies provide the army with draftee manpower, foodstuffs, and an advanced industrial base which supports the military infrastructure.²⁹ The failure of Soviet central authorities to maintain control over the region would result in the loss of these assets. Though the loss of the economic assets would be a serious blow to the Soviet Union's crisis-ridden economy, the number of draftees provided to the Soviet Army by the three Baltic republics is insignificant. Baltic youths of conscript age make up less than two percent

²⁷Kristen Amundsen, *Soviet Strategic Interests in the North* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), 70-71.

²⁸Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area*, 20.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

(2%) of the total soviet draft-age population.³⁰ Bitter complaints on the part of military officials concerning draft evasion in the Baltic republics seem related primarily to concerns that failure to confront this problem will encourage draft evasion in other republics. While the non-participation of Baltic youth in universal military service does not impact significantly on Soviet war-fighting capabilities, the loss of the Baltic territories and economic base would be disastrous.

Republican Armies and Territorial Defense

The loss of Soviet political control over the Baltic states would almost certainly result in the formation of separate republican armies in the region. Each of the three republics has indicated some interest in forming territorial defense forces of one sort or another. The Soviet military establishment regards this as highly unacceptable. Soviet military authorities have publicly voiced their objections on operational grounds, but they undoubtedly have other tacit objections as well. The idea of separate national armies has not received much direct criticism, until very recently. Soviet objections to this idea, however, can be derived from the debate over the return to the territorial-militia principle of manning

³⁰Alex Alexiev and S. Enders Wimbush, *Ethnic Minorities in the Red Army: Asset or Liability?*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 219.

in the Soviet forces. Those arguments advanced in opposition to the idea of manning military units on a territorial basis apply, even more forcefully, to the idea of separate national armies.

The Soviet General Staff's arguments against the idea of territorial defense units can be summarized as follows:

1) modern military operations require highly centralized direction; 2) peacetime training and technological development, as well as wartime strategic operations require a fully-integrated force; 3) the breaking up of the Soviet Army into territorial formations would decrease the defensive capabilities of Soviet forces; and 4) some territorial units would not be reliable in defense of the Motherland.

An important principle in Soviet military doctrine is continuous strategic leadership, even in peacetime, to provide for proper preparation and rapid mobilization. In addition, the "revolution in military affairs" (the advent of nuclear weapons) and the highly mobile and lethal nature of modern warfare necessitate the highly centralized direction of combat operations.³¹ Despite the traditional emphasis on centralization in Soviet military thinking, territorial formations were used in the past (1924-25). Soviet military writers claim that this was only possible due to the absence of a significant threat, and that the current "transitional period"

³¹William F. and Harriet Fast Scott, *Armed Forces of the USSR*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 86, 120.

is too dangerous for such experiments.³² Even those reforms considered radical by the Ministry of Defense call for keeping territorial formations under strict central control.³³

Unity of command problems are not the only ones raised by the formation of separate territorial defense entities. Lack of integration, in the Soviet view, leads to problems of interoperability, poor preparation for combat, and constrains the General Staff from deploying the force to adequately meet threats to Soviet security. Past Soviet experiences with the territorial manning system have convinced military officers that it leads to a lack of standardization in technological development, peacetime preparation and military doctrine.³⁴ This makes combined operations on a strategic scale nearly impossible. Moreover, if national-militia units are based on a territorial defense principle, they may not be available to

³²N.A. Mal'tsev, "Kadrovaya ili Militsionnaya?: O Printsipakh Komplektovaniya Sovetskikh Vooruzhonnikh Sil," [Cadre or Militia?: On the Principles of Manning of the Soviet Armed Forces], *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, no. 11, 1989, pp. 30-40. This article argues that centralized direction of the army and fleet is one of the most important principles of organization of the armed forces.

³³See V. Lopatin, et. al., "On the Preparation and Conduct of Military Reform in the USSR," *MEMO*, September 9, 1990. Abstracted on the Soviet Army Studies Office Net, 1990. Lopatin's "radical" ideas are anathema to the General Staff, yet even he calls for maintaining republican formations under central control in wartime.

³⁴V. Kul'pinskiy, "Oboronnyi Shchit ili 'Poteshnoe Voisko'?" [Defensive Shield or 'Mock Army?'], *Sovetskaya Latvya*, April 20, 1989.

defend other parts of the union where the threat may be greater. Soviet military authorities are clearly worried that territorial based units will refuse to fight outside their republics. This includes those officers responsible for frontier security, who are concerned that local republican forces may not be adequate to provide for the defense of state borders without reinforcement from outside the republic. For example, the commander of the Baltic Border District, General-Lieutenant Gaponenko, has criticized the idea that each republic be responsible for the protection of its own part of the Soviet frontier. He states that since the protection of the frontier affects the whole union, it must be the concern of the whole union.³⁵

The General Staff clearly believes that separate territorial defense units would sharply degrade the defensive (and offensive) capabilities of the Soviet Armed Forces, but they also seriously question the ability of the smaller republics to adequately defend their own territory. The General Staff does not believe that national military formations can provide adequate security under modern conditions, given weapons of mass destruction and large groupings of opposing forces. The Soviet Union has built up a massive military organization with five main branches of service, a complex and advanced system of weaponry and logistical support, and several kinds of highly

³⁵V.K. Gaponenko, "Chasovie Rodini Stoyat..." [Watchmen of the Motherland are on Guard...], *Sovietskaya Latvya*, May 28, 1989.

specialized units and formations. Senior military officials continually question whether any of the republics individually would be materially and economically capable of providing the complex organization, equipment, and readiness training to adequately defend against enemy attack.³⁶ The Chief of the Soviet General Staff, General Moiseev, recently stated that the republics could not field viable forces on their own. He pointed out that the USSR spends 700 million rubles a year just to maintain one of the western border military districts, and questioned the ability of any republic to commit that level of resources to its own defense.³⁷

The Baltic republics have been directly criticized by military officials both in Moscow and in the Baltic region for their unrealistic appraisal of true Soviet Defense needs. An article in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* criticized the Latvian People's Front for demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and having a starry-eyed view of the threat to Soviet security. The article derided suggestions that Latvian proposals to form one infantry division would be adequate to defend the republic.

³⁶V.I. Filatov, et. al., "Natsional'nie Voyennie Formirovanie: Vchera... Sevodnya? Zavtra?" [National Military Formations: Yesterday... Today? Tomorrow?], *Voenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*, no. 5, 1990, pp. 47-51. See also V. Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka" [Uniform Out of an Old Trunk], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 14, 1989. Urban points out that during the present period, when the Soviet Armed Forces are trying to carry out a qualitative improvement in technology, national military formations will not be able to keep pace and would set the whole program back.

³⁷*Izvestia*. December 22, 1990.

According to the author, this proposal would result in regiments of "toy soldiers" without tanks and artillery, totally at odds with the general system of the Soviet armed forces.³⁸ The Estonians are planning for a more extensive buildup, including two regular divisions, border troops, rescue and labor units, and reserve forces. As noted above, some military authorities doubt the economic ability of the republic to sustain such a force, and others wonder if this trend will lead to a new arms race on the Eurasian continent.³⁹

In the final analysis, the Soviets simply do not believe that the Baltic states, or any other republic for that matter, can adequately defend their frontiers. The same was true in 1939. Commenting on the inability of the Baltic states to resist German aggression, Molotov said: "The fact that the northwestern frontier of the USSR remains unprotected, may serve to provoke aggression in the direction of the Soviet Union."⁴⁰ Baltic commitments to provide for the security of the Soviet Union are called into question in articles criticizing the Baltic republics for allowing conditions of lax border security. Border district officials, again drawing parallels to the interwar period, write that the bourgeois governments of the

³⁸FBIS, Daily Report, (March 6, 1989), 78.

³⁹Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (December 17, 1990).

⁴⁰Albert N. Tarulis, "Unused Springboard and Insecure Safety Zone," *Baltic Review*, no. 21, (New York: 1960).

Baltic states had their border defenses oriented against the Soviet Union prior to 1940, leaving the Baltic Coast virtually unprotected. Today they are accused of reducing border patrols to an unacceptably dangerous level, and allowing virtually open borders.⁴¹ These criticisms are reminiscent of those levelled at the reformist Czechoslovak government prior to the 1968 Warsaw pact invasion.⁴²

In addition to doubting the ability of the Baltic States to adequately defend Soviet frontiers, Soviet military officers doubt the reliability of national forces in a conflict with the West. Several authors of military articles have wondered aloud against whom ("protiv kogo") the Baltic states are arming themselves. They fear, justifiably that the Baltic states will orient their defenses eastward⁴³, in an attempt to resist a future introduction of Soviet troops. Given the history of

⁴¹On parallels to inadequacy of border security by interwar Baltic governments see Gaponenko, "Chasoviye Rodini Stoyat." For criticism of laxity of present border controls, see V. Urban, "Piket na Fonye Pogranzoni" [Post in the Border Zone], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 16, 1989.

⁴²Karen Dawisha, "Soviet Security and the Role of the Military: The 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis," *British Journal of Political Science*, no. 10 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 355.

⁴³N. Aksinin, "'Vostochnaya' Politika Polna Protivorechii" ['Eastern' Policy is Wholly Contradictory], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 19, 1990.

Baltic national formations in the Second World War⁴⁴, the Soviet military has reason to believe that national formations on their northwestern coast might very well join with foreign aggressors in an attack on the Soviet Union. Recent articles on the subject of separate republican armies have reminded Soviet readers that during the Civil War Estonian forces joined with General Yudenich in his 1919 attack on Soviet Russia.⁴⁵

Demilitarization of the Baltic

There is another outcome in the Baltic states that may trouble Soviet strategic planners every bit as much as the rise of foreign armies on their frontiers: the demilitarization of the Baltic region. The identification of the Baltic republics with neutral Scandinavia and recent statements by Popular Front leaders in the three republics, suggest that future independent Baltic states would follow the lead of some of the newly liberated East European states in embracing the concept of

⁴⁴Alex Alexiev, "Soviet Nationalities Under Attack: The WWII Experience," in Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities*, 61. As will be discussed further below, Baltic troops quickly folded in the June 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union, and some even fired on retreating Soviet soldiers. Alexiev understates: "...in a moment of acute crisis for Soviet power, multinationalism became a questionable strategic asset."

⁴⁵Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka."

"defenseless defense."⁴⁶ Soviet officers are concerned with a general wave of pacifism and support for denuclearization which they feel threatens the security of the region.⁴⁷

Soviet military authorities have criticized Soviet youth generally for their pacifism and political naivety. They complain that since the young do not remember the experiences of WWII, they are growing up without an appreciation for the sacrifices necessary to guarantee the security of the homeland, take peace for granted and underestimate the dangers of war. According to Ellen Jones, the groups singled out for such criticism are non-Russian minorities and urban, consumer-conscious urbanites who are predisposed to apathy and pacifism. Also of concern are religious believers who use their religion as an excuse to evade military service.⁴⁸ The Baltic states are dominated by non-Russian ethnic groups, have a highly urbanized population with one of the highest material standards of living in the Soviet Union, and have a large proportion of religious believers. It has been here in the Baltic states that resistance to the draft has been the most pronounced. These

⁴⁶Covington, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷R. Pyder, "Otrizanie Otrizania" [Negation Of The Negation], *Sovetskaya Estonia*, November 28, 1989. Author notes the prevailing opinion: "Recently pacifist attitudes have substantially intensified."

⁴⁸Ellen Jones, *Red Army and Society: A Sociology of the Soviet Military* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 154-55.

facts, coupled with the actions of Baltic governments in demilitarizing society⁴⁹, have alarmed Soviet military authorities, and confirmed them in their belief that local governments cannot be relied on to guarantee Soviet security.

Soviet military officials are also concerned by anti-nuclear sentiment which they fear may lead to a denuclearized Baltic region. The Baltic states are attracted to the anti-nuclear policies of the Nordic states. Ironically, the Soviets have supported the idea of a Nordic Nuclear-Free Zone (NNFZ) and even offered to be its guarantor. They have, however, consistently rejected the notion that Soviet territory be included in the NNFZ.⁵⁰ Recently, Eduard Schevardnadze proposed the idea of a nuclear free Baltic Sea, with both the Soviet Union and NATO renouncing the peacetime deployment of nuclear weapons on ships or warplanes in the Baltic sea or in the airspace over it. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian proposals on the matter, however have gone beyond the Soviet ones in that they include the entire Baltic region.⁵¹ The Baltic states have even announced their plans to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, because they see no need for nuclear weapons and want to deny the Soviet central government

⁴⁹Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka." This article criticizes Estonian actions to demilitarize society, such as taking military training out of schools and restricting other forms of pre-induction military training.

⁵⁰Amundsen, *Soviet Strategic Interests*, 55.

⁵¹Radio Riga, (December 10, 1990).

the propaganda point that a breakup of the Soviet Union would result in the emergence of "15 nuclear nations."⁵²

If Soviet military authorities are worried about the demilitarization of the Baltic region, they may have only themselves to blame. In the Baltic states the Soviet armed forces are seen "...as an alien force 'theirs', not 'ours'."⁵³ Soviet manning and stationing policies have completely alienated the Baltic populations from the idea of military service. The only military necessity recognized by most Baltic citizens is the need to defend their countries from aggression by the Soviet Union. The Soviet military authorities have suppressed the formation of national-territorial formations, stationed Baltic soldiers far from home in inhospitable locations, and discouraged Baltic citizens from seeking careers in the professional military.⁵⁴ The Balts were robbed of the opportunity to participate fully in a "...historic institution in which loyalty, integrity, and service are meaningful concepts which bind them to the goals of the Soviet leadership."⁵⁵ Without an indigenous professional military, there is no

⁵²Spero, *op. cit.*

⁵³Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area*, 33.

⁵⁴Jones, *Red Army and Society*, chapter 7. See also Alexiev and Wimbush, *Ethnic Minorities in the Red Army*.

⁵⁵S. Enders Wimbush, "Nationalities in the Soviet Armed Forces," in Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities*, 245.

constituency in the Baltic states for a strong defense policy, except with regard to the need to resist Soviet aggression. The Soviets have themselves contributed to the demilitarization of the Baltic region, a situation which exacerbates the strategic vulnerability of the area.

Baltic Security Dilemma

It is clear that the Soviet military and political leadership can accept neither the prospect of armed independent Baltic nations nor the prospect of neutral, demilitarized Baltic states on their frontier. Some would argue that the needs of both sides could be accommodated by the right kind of treaties or agreements. While the Soviet Union has relied in the past on political measures such as treaties and political-economic relationships to create a better security environment, the Soviet Union has not viewed its partners in such relationships as reliable or benign. Military power has remained the only truly reliable means for maintaining Soviet security.⁵⁶ The Soviet Union had non-aggression pacts with the Baltic states prior to their forcible inclusion into the USSR, but obviously

⁵⁶Stephen M. Meyer, "The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security," in Lynn-Jones and others, *Soviet Military Policy...*, *op. cit.*, 125.

did not view these as adequate guarantees.⁵⁷ Baltic spokesmen have indicated that they recognize that the Soviet Union has legitimate strategic interests in the region, which they would be willing to address⁵⁸, but the Soviet military is not likely to look on these assurances very favorably. The WWII experiences of surprise invasion and the high cost of defending the USSR have justified to the Soviets their view that verbal protestations of concern for Soviet security are not enough—they must have tangible guarantees.⁵⁹ For Soviet military leaders the only tangible guarantee they are willing to rely on is the military force they themselves control:

The Armed Forces are the guarantor of the peaceful labor of Soviet citizens...Therefore you should not get it into your head that our people...with their own hands would destroy the well-developed mechanism which guarantees their security."⁶⁰

The Baltic States present the Soviet Union with a unique security dilemma. On the one hand, the USSR cannot accept the

⁵⁷Tarulis, "Unused Springboard...", 49. In 1939 the Lithuanian government agreed to accept Soviet financial and military aid, double its military potential, and build defensive fortifications at places agreed upon by the two parties. The Soviet government rejected even these significant offers as inadequate.

⁵⁸TASS World Service, (January 4, 1991). Lithuanian spokesman stated that agreement could be reached on the stationing of those troops necessary to protect Soviet strategic interests, especially Air Defense units. Implicit in his remarks was the exclusion of large formations of ground troops, Ministry of Interior troops and KGB border guards which are not "strategically" necessary.

⁵⁹Dawisha, "Soviet Security...", 344.

⁶⁰Filatov, et. al., "Natsional'nie Voennie Formirovanie...", 50.

presence of strong, heavily armed independent states on its frontier. These states might then join with other foreign powers in aggression against the Soviet Union, or at least actively resist the occupation of their territory during a crisis in which the Soviet military tried to deploy forces there. In this sense, the security of the Soviet Union requires the insecurity of the Baltic states. On the other hand, the presence of weak, demilitarized neutral states on its border would leave the Soviet Union totally unprotected in a key sector. This is as unacceptable today as it was in 1939, when Molotov said "We cannot permit small states to be used against the USSR, neutral Baltic States--that's too insecure."⁶¹ In the Soviet military view, on strategic, operational and tactical grounds alone, there is no other acceptable option than the continued occupation of the Baltic States. This reality, however, has taken on political meanings which go beyond the narrow military considerations discussed here.

⁶¹Quoted in Tarulis, "Unused Springboard...", 50.

CHAPTER III

THE LEGITIMACY OF SOVIET AUTHORITY AND THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE BALTIC

The tense standoff in the Soviet Baltic between the military establishment and the separatist republican governments is part of the larger crisis of legitimacy in Soviet politics. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* have empowered local political organizations at the expense of the organs of central control, including the Communist Party, the KGB, and the Armed Forces. The decentralization of power has gone much further than Gorbachev could have intended or desired, raising the spectre of the Soviet Union's breakup into 15 or more separate states. The Communist Party, KGB, and Armed Forces see the preservation of the Union as essential to their continued existence as governmental organs. It is hardly surprising, then, that these organizations almost uniformly oppose any weakening of the Center's role in the Soviet state.

The situation in the Baltic, however, contains some unique aspects that are particularly troubling for the Soviet military. The Baltic quest for independence is the most direct and unambiguous challenge to Soviet authority which has arisen as a result of the recent reforms. Moreover, based on the central

role played by the Soviet military in initially seizing control of the Baltic republics and making possible their continued "imprisonment" in the Soviet state, the Baltic peoples and governments have attacked the military as the most visible and onerous symbol of their continued domination by the Soviet Union. These attacks have taken the form of questioning the morality of Soviet military actions during World War II, pointing to the central role played by the military in policing the state, and challenging the authority of the armed forces to conscript Baltic youth. In addition, non-Baltic servicemen have been treated as unwelcome foreigners, rather than Soviet citizens, and have been subject to discrimination in housing, employment and education. This course of events alarms the Soviet military establishment. The situation in the Baltic republics has posed a direct challenge to the Army's prestige, role, and place in Soviet society, and perhaps even to its continued existence. In addition, military officers see their entire way of life endangered by the emergence of non-Soviet civilian authority in the Baltic republics.

Three themes dominate the Soviet military press (as well as the Russian-language Baltic press) in connection with the crisis in the Baltic. First, the reevaluation of history unleashed by Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* has resulted in a "battle" between the Baltic ethnic communities and the military over the meaning of key historical events, especially those concerning the Great Patriotic War. Second, military writers tirelessly

criticize the emergence of what they term an "Anti-Army Campaign" carried on by Baltic separatists and aimed at besmirching the prestige of the armed forces. Often included in criticisms of the Anti-Army Campaign are allegations of discrimination against military personnel stationed in the Baltic region. Third, there are claims that Soviet society, especially in the Baltic republics, is becoming demilitarized. The arguments used by Soviet military writers and civilian authors supportive of the military reveal strongly held beliefs and attitudes which are at the core of the Soviet military's opposition to Baltic independence.

The Battle for History: Occupation or Liberation?

The struggle in the Baltic has shaped up as a clash of the national myths and political cultures of two communities: the Baltic and the Great Russian. The three Baltic states see themselves as sharing a common historical destiny, despite differences in their historical and cultural development both before and after subjugation by the Soviet Union. The three small states gained and lost their independence in this century under the same circumstances, and have the same problematic relationship with their Great Russian/Soviet neighbor and conqueror.

In each of the three republics there are sizable non-Baltic populations made up primarily of Russians, Poles, and Belorussians. These minority groups are not uniform in their attitudes toward the Soviet Union or the Baltic independence movements. Many of these people share the Balts' resentment at Moscow's heavy hand in economic exploitation of the region and the large-scale presence of Soviet troops there. Many of these non-Balts are supporters of the Baltic independence movements, seeing a brighter future in an independent Lithuania or Estonia than in the USSR. Nevertheless, there are a significant number of Russians in the Baltic, who have come to look upon the region as home and who look to Moscow for protection and support. These people are motivated in their opposition to Baltic independence by national chauvinism and the fear of being turned into second-class citizens. They have no desire to assimilate, learn the national languages and take part in the distinctive culture of their host republics. They view their residence in the Baltic as a birthright conveyed on them by their membership in the Soviet Union's dominant ethnic group.

These Russian minorities have a powerful ally: the armed forces. The Soviet officer corps is overwhelmingly Russian and Slavic.¹ The military's belief that order, discipline, and prestige must be restored to the government, military and other law-making institutions has aligned it with the nationalist

¹Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities*, 233. The Soviet officer corps is estimated to be about 80% Russian.

"right" in Soviet society. Moreover, the military establishment in the Baltic² has identified itself closely with the embattled Russian minorities in the region. Soviet military officers often complain that non-Balts and the russian-speaking (russkoyazichnoe) population are treated as second-rate citizens without a homeland, without roots and without culture.³ As will be discussed further below, the Soviet military complains about the same kind of discrimination being directed against service personnel as is generally directed against non-Balts, especially Russians:

Recently relations between nationalities have starkly worsened ... Discrimination against the non-native population, including servicemen, is only intensifying a complex situation.⁴

The nature of Baltic attacks against the Soviet military as the instrument of Russian domination, and the identification of the Soviet military with the embattled Russian minority population has polarized the conflict in the Baltic into one of competing nationalisms: Russian vs. Baltic.

Two prominent Soviet experts on the national question have noted that:

²The Baltic area is home to three major Soviet military commands: The Baltic Military District, the Baltic Fleet, and the Baltic Border Guard District, a KGB paramilitary police unit. See Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area*.

³See for example, O. Zinchenko, "Sluzhim v Pribaltike" [We Serve in the Baltic], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, December 20, 1989.

⁴N. Smirnova, "...I Obshie Bedy" [...And General Troubles], *Sovietskaya Litva*, October 6, 1989.

... the national consciousness of a people, like that of an individual, rest[s] to a significant degree on the properties of memory ... a people becomes conscious of its common character above all through the community of its culture, historical destinies, and traditions. National consciousness is always historical consciousness, establishing the continuity of the present and the future with the past.⁵

It is useful, therefore, to think of the Baltic peoples and the Russian-dominated military establishment as "communities of memory".⁶ A "community of memory" is a community which does not forget its past; one which is constantly involved in retelling its story. It does this by recounting the historical events and the deeds of men and women which embody and exemplify the meaning of the community. Both the Baltic and Soviet military communities fit this definition. For the Baltic republics the tale is one of heroism in the face of near subjugation by the Soviet Union in 1918-1920, twenty years of productive and joyful independence, and consecutive occupations by the Soviet Union, the Nazis, and then the Soviet Union once again. The Soviet military's tale is one of heroic struggle in the Revolution and Civil War, insecurity and internal terror between the wars, and glorious triumph in the Great Patriotic War. Soviet military and political leaders understand the significance of these "memories" very well. The

⁵Iu. V. Bromlei and M.I. Kulichenko, "Natsional'noe i Internatsional'noe v obraze zhizni sovetskogo cheloveka" [The National and International in the Way of Life of the Soviet Person], *Nauchyi Kommunizm*, 1982, No. 4, 10. Quoted in Wimbush, ed., *Soviet Nationalities*, 162.

⁶The term "community of memory" comes from Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 206-207.

military-patriotic education program in the Soviet Union is "fundamentally backward looking,"⁷ an effort to instill values in people by recalling past experiences, allowing those born after the events to relive them vicariously.

The problem is that the Baltic community considers the Soviet Union, especially the military, to be the central villain and principal threat to its existence throughout the most important events of its collective history. Moreover, this belief directly challenges the Soviet military's positive interpretation of its own history, which depicts some of the very same events as exploits rather than tragedies. What has emerged in the era of *glasnost* is a war of competing versions of history, pitting one national community against another, with the military squarely on the side of the Russian community. In this climate of historical revisionism, with the very legitimacy of Soviet authority in question, the most often heard accusation on either side of the argument is that one's opponents are distorting history. For example, military veterans in Latvia complained that they are being attacked, and that pro-independence republican authorities are "falsifying the historical events of the [wartime] period."⁸ A Soviet

⁷Timothy J. Colton, "The Impact of the Military on Soviet Society," in Seweryn Bialer, ed., *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 124.

⁸Unattributed, "Eto Volnuet, Trevozhit, Zabotit

military writer succinctly summarized the polarization of the situation in the Baltic when he wrote that "Many people in Lithuania now determine their attitude toward you by which of these versions [of history] you share."⁹

The Legacy of the Great Patriotic War

Paul Goble has noted that:

...There is virtually no event in Soviet history whose discussion does not increase national divisions. Collectivization, for example, looks very different in Ukraine and Khazakhstan...than in Moscow...Even the Great Patriotic War which Moscow views as the best proof of the Soviet Union's unity, divides the people of the Baltic Republics—who lost their independence as the result of the Hitler-Stalin Pacts—from those who remember the war as a singular achievement.¹⁰

As Goble points out, the issue which places the people of the Baltic into direct conflict with the Soviet military is the issue of the Great Patriotic War. The Russian victory in the Second World War represents the Soviet government's one unequivocal victory on behalf of the nation. It is a source of

Veteranov" [It Upsets, Alarms and Worries Veterans], *Sovietskaya Latvia*, May 22, 1990. See also N. Smirnova, "...A Chto Volnuet Armii" [...But What Bothers the Army], *Sovietskaya Litva*, August 10, 1989.

⁹Aleksey Khorev, "Face to Face with Half-truth," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 13, 1989, translated in FBIS, Daily Report, (May 17, 1989), 76.

¹⁰Paul Goble, "Ethnic Politics in the USSR," *Problems of Communism* 38 (Jul/Aug 1989): 3.

legitimacy and public support the government did not have before, and one it has drawn on ever since. Nevertheless, victory in the Great Patriotic War was very much a *Russian* victory. Stalin encouraged Russian, not Soviet, patriotism as basis for resistance to the Nazis, and Russians are extremely proud of their achievement. Despite Soviet attempts to put an "internationalist face" on victory in the war¹¹, Russians and non-Russians alike consider it primarily a Russian achievement.

For the Soviet military there is no more important period of history than the years 1941-1945. The "baptism of fire" which the Army experienced during that period has shaped the development of the Soviet Armed Forces and even Soviet society to the present day. For the military and political leaders who actually took part in those historic events, the Great Patriotic War is equivalent to the Chinese Communists' Long March. The battles and campaigns of that war are still studied and dissected for their tactical, operational and strategic lessons. Even today, countless commemorative articles appear in every kind of newspaper and journal recounting the exploits of that war from the standpoint of selected participants. Monuments, museums, ceremonies and street names keep the memory of the war alive in every corner of the Soviet Union. One of the primary

¹¹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the official newspaper of the Ministry of Defense, and Russian language newspapers in the non-Russian republics regularly "trot out" non-Russian veterans for interviews on the anniversary of key victories. See for example A. Grigoryan, "Na Rodnoi Zemle" [On Native Land], *Sovetskaya Latvija*, July 18, 1989.

goals of military socialization of young recruits is to instill pride for the memory of the Second World War.¹² In this way, the Army has served the state by elevating the notion of sacrifice, linking past achievements and struggle, especially those of the Civil and Great Patriotic Wars, with contemporary demands.¹³

Military power is the basis for the USSR's claim to great power status. It is a source of pride for the whole Russian nation, and a critical source of legitimacy for the Soviet leadership. Any diminution in this strength would be a blow to the military's prestige and the government's legitimacy.¹⁴ The so-called Anti-Army Campaign, which has been conducted by the pro-independence People's Fronts and non-Communist governments of the Baltic republics is, in Soviet military eyes, a direct attack on the place of the military in Soviet society. In the Baltic republics, those opposed to continued Soviet power have attacked the military, directly and indirectly, for the part it played in subjugating the republics after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the brutal occupation of 1940, the still more brutal reoccupation of 1944, and the continued Soviet domination of the republics to the present day. Baltic

¹² Jones, *Red Army and Society*, 152.

¹³ Stephen R. Covington, "Soviet Security Reform: Implications for NATO's Transformation in the 90's," unpublished paper, 1990.

¹⁴ Jones, *Red Army and Society*, 218.

separatists have taken the proudest pages from Soviet military history and reinterpreted them in a way that constitutes an attack on the army's character and legitimacy. The Soviet military has not simply absorbed these attacks in silence, however. Officers have answered these assaults with ringing rejections and counter-accusations, which themselves reveal a great deal about the nature of their continued insistence on maintaining Soviet domination of the Baltic.

The "Pact"

No issue has generated more heat in the Soviet Baltic than the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop or Hiler-Stalin Pact¹⁵ and its associated "secret protocols". Baltic dissidents had long repeated the view held by virtually all western historians that a secret protocol existed, which in conjunction with the public pact divided Europe up into "spheres of influence", with the Baltic falling within the Soviet sphere. The government of Mikhail Gorbachev, beginning in 1987, called for a reevaluation of history, intending to discredit the "stalinist" policies of the past. Baltic spokesman quickly took up the challenge, criticizing Stalin's foreign policy, especially the conclusion

¹⁵ This refers to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 23, 1939, signed by the two governments' respective Foreign Ministers, which ushered in a two-year period of German-Soviet rapprochement ending in the June 21, 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union.

of the 1939 pact with Germany. One Latvian writer went so far as to say (in November 1988): "As Stalinism is exposed, the word 'occupation' is exposed."¹⁶ Other Baltic spokesmen have consistently referred to the pact as a "criminal act" and a violation of international political norms.

Soviet military leaders initially remained aloof from these arguments. Following the line laid down by Gorbachev, a writer in *Krasnaya Zvezda* allowed that "not all aspects of Soviet prewar foreign policy meet the high standards of socialist morality: Stalin's cult of personality was at work...."¹⁷ Nevertheless, until mid-summer, 1989, the military along with the rest of the Soviet government maintained that the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been a necessary strategic measure in the face of German aggression and British and French machinations. Moreover, they continued to maintain that the secret protocols simply did not exist.

All of this changed in late July 1989, when Valentin Falin, the head of the CPSU's International Affairs Department admitted the existence of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop

¹⁶ FBIS, Daily Report, (November 18, 1988), 56.

¹⁷ F. Sverdlov, "Pomnit Staraya Bashnya" [An Old Tower Remembers], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, July 12, 1989.

pact in an interview in West Germany.¹⁸ This was the first part of a campaign by the Gorbachev government to seize the initiative in reevaluating this painful and divisive issue. Two commissions were formed in August, 1989 to investigate the questions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the secret protocols, one commission from the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, and the other from the CPSU Central Committee on International Affairs. Both commissions were headed by Gorbachev aide Aleksandr Yakovlev. Yakovlev stated that the goal was to make the USSR a "civic state governed by the rule of law."¹⁹ A few days later Yakovlev announced that the secret protocol's "existence is not in doubt."²⁰

Yakovlev affirmed the view that Stalin's actions in signing the pact with Germany and the associated protocols were a departure from the norms of foreign policy laid out by Lenin. Nevertheless he maintained that the signing of the pact was necessary for the security of the Soviet Union. The Gorbachev government certainly did not want to fuel separatist passions in the Baltic States and other places, such as Moldavia, which also came under Soviet control as a result of the Pact with Germany.

¹⁸ FBIS, Daily Report, (July 23, 1989). Perhaps predictably, a conservative military figure, V. I. Filatov, editor of the *Military-Historical Journal* [*Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*], continued to maintain, even after Falin's admission, that the existence of the secret protocols was questionable. See FBIS, Daily Report, August 14, 1989, 75.

¹⁹ FBIS, Daily Report, (August 14, 1989), 76.

²⁰ FBIS, Daily Report, (August 21, 1989), 69-76.

Yakovlev maintained that the negation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact did not change the present reality of the Baltic republics' political status, as that status was not based on the Pact, which was, in any case, invalidated by the German attack of June 1941. He categorically rejected the notion that the pre-war political situation should be restored, and reminded the Soviet public, including those in the Baltic, that "Nationalism in any form is a mortal poison to any society".²¹

Although Yakovlev had been careful to denounce separatism and nationalism, many conservatives, including those in the military, felt he had "let the genie out of the bottle". In an article in the conservative *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, he was accused of pandering to Lithuanian extremists because of his position on the illegality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the secret protocols.²² Yakovlev's comments were a source of concern for military leaders because they fueled the growth of what the military calls the "occupation syndrome" in the Baltic republics. By conceding the illegality of the initial basis for

²¹*Ibid.*, Yakovlev made these comments in an interview in Pravda on August 18, 1989. Yakovlev's denunciation of nationalism is consistent with his career-long stand on the issue. He has been attacked by the nationalist right in Russia for his criticism of Great Russian nationalism.

²²Alexander Prokhanov, "Tragedia tsentralizatsii" [The Tragedy of Centralization], *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, No. 1 (January 5, 1990), 4-5. Cited in Jacob Kipp, "The Russian Military and the Right: A Paradox of the Politization of the Soviet Armed Forces Under *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*," unpublished paper, U.S. Army Soviet Army Studies Office, 1990.

the introduction of troops into the region, the Gorbachev government had, in the military's eyes, given ammunition to those who were attacking the legitimacy of the Soviet military presence in the Baltic. And they were right.

In October 1989, The Working Group of the Commission of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR issued a report which concluded, in part, that:

The destruction of the sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and their incorporation into the USSR was the logical consequence of the agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany, and it took place in the Summer of 1940....²³

The report also stated that the agreement and its consequences must be considered "null and void from the moment of their signing."²⁴ Balts recognize that the Soviet government, in order to rid itself of a troublesome issue, is willing to admit that the pact and the protocols were illegal, but are ignoring the political assessments flowing from that admission. Nevertheless, the Baltic governments have used the issue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to attack the legal basis of the military's presence, and are branding all events subsequent to August 1939 as equally invalid.

²³"Report of the Working Group of the Commission of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR," translated by Pauls Raudseps, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, XXI, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 81. (Hereafter "Report of the Working Group...").

²⁴*Ibid.*, 83.

The Occupation of the Baltic States

Baltic nationalists consider the events of 1939-1940 ²⁵ to be the best proof of the illegitimacy of Soviet authority in the Baltic region and of the role of military power in maintaining Soviet hegemony. Between August 1939 and June 1940 Stalin's government carried out the occupation and subjugation of the Baltic States, as part of its larger effort to prepare for potential German aggression. The Baltic States were pressured into signing mutual assistance treaties with the Soviet Union, allowing the stationing of Soviet troops on Baltic soil. Subsequently, reinforcement troops were introduced, ostensibly to counter provocation by anti-Soviet "reactionaries" and to protect the previously deployed garrisons.²⁶ By mid-June 1940 the Soviets had introduced a sizeable contingent of ground and naval troops into the region. The Baltic governments were forced to resign under pressure from Moscow and new elections were held. The elections were held in an atmosphere of terror, in such a way as to insure that only approved candidates were elected. Red Army troops directly supervised the polling. A Latvian group concluded that "It was, in fact, a coup d' etat in

²⁵An authoritative historical source for the events of this period is Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States....*

²⁶A. Kleimenov, "Pribaltika, God 1939: Zachem Vodilis Sovetskie Voiska" [Baltic, 1939: Why Soviet Troops Were Brought In], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 26, 1989.

the presence of an occupying army."²⁷ Although the NKVD had already set up shop in 1939 with the first Soviet garrisons, it was not until June 1940, after being reinforced by regular Soviet troops, that the arrests and deportations began.²⁸ Thus while the military usually pleads innocence when political crimes are discussed, the Baltic peoples consider the Armed Forces to be the primary instrument of Soviet imperialism. The Army is blamed in the Baltic states for Stalin's policies of occupation and repression.

Military officers and writers have answered these accusations by asserting that the introduction of troops into the Baltic States in 1940 was a strategic necessity, and that, in any case, the troops were introduced with the agreement of the "bourgeois" governments. For example:

It is well known that the Red Army came to Latvia in 1940, with the consent of the bourgeois government of Latvia. The assertion that "the entire Latvian people opposed the affiliation of Latvia to the USSR and the entry of Red Army troops into the republic," is a lie.²⁹

In an article in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, one author further asserted

²⁷"Report of the Working Group...", 82-84. See also Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 27.

²⁸Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 38.

²⁹FBIS, Daily Report, (March 6, 1989).

that the 3 Baltic States willingly agreed to the introduction of the troops in negotiations and that the entering forces were welcomed with great pomp and ceremony.³⁰

Attack, Occupation and Collaboration

There is no more emotion-charged word in the Soviet Baltic today than the word "occupiers". Native Balts use this word to insult and admonish the Soviet military personnel stationed on their soil, implicitly (sometimes explicitly) equating the present Soviet occupation with the fascist occupation of 1941-44. Since the essence of the Soviet Union's struggle during the Great Patriotic War was its opposition to fascism, this is indeed a stinging insult. Soviet military writers and leaders have countered by equating Baltic nationalists with the fascists, drawing on the wartime experiences of the German attack on the Soviet Union and the period of Nazi occupation.

Soviet military officials base their identification of Baltic nationalists with the fascists at least in part on the cooperation the Baltic populations gave the conquering Germans during and immediately after the June 21, 1941 attack on the Soviet Union. Many Baltic citizens did, in fact, eagerly await

³⁰Kleimenov, "Pribaltika..." According to this article, the ceremonies in Estonia included speeches by dignitaries, the playing of national anthems and an exchange of 21-gun salutes.

the German attack and "by June '41 the word 'war' had become synonymous with liberation from Stalinism."³¹ The defeat of the USSR was seen as necessary to free the Baltic from the yoke of Soviet repression. Baltic Corps, set up by the Soviet Army and based on the pre-war Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian armies, folded quickly in the initial German attack amid massive defections and desertions. Some Balts even fired on retreating Red Army soldiers.³² Indeed, there are not any known instances of spontaneous native Baltic opposition to the German advance.³³ After the German victory in the Baltic, the local populations proved willing to cooperate with the German invaders. Balts served in German military units intended for both front-line and anti-partisan activity. Baltic military units were among the first organized in Eastern Europe under German supervision.³⁴ Three Baltic divisions of the Waffen SS, as well as many smaller units fought alongside the Germans right to the end of the war.³⁵

This legacy of cooperation with the fascist occupiers has furnished Soviet military critics with ample evidence to use in

³¹ Saulius Suziedelis, "Military Mobilization Campaigns of 1943 and 1944 in German Occupied Lithuania: Contrasts in Resistance and Collaboration," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, XXI, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 34.

³² Trapans, *Soviet Military in the Baltic Area*, 30.

³³ Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 42.

³⁴ Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities...*, 70-71.

³⁵ Alexiev and Wimbush, *Ethnic Minorities...*, 112.

implicitly equating present-day nationalists with the former fascist enemy. Any Baltic anti-Soviet activity during the wartime period is retrospectively interpreted as support for the Germans' genocidal policies.³⁶ In an article entitled "Uniform Out of an Old Trunk," present-day Balts identifying with their prewar national military traditions are likened to fascist sympathizers who willingly helped the Nazis.³⁷ More ominously, the new police forces (militias) formed by the Balts to handle internal police functions are identified as "enemy units":

Actually the army of bourgeois Lithuania is being resurrected. It is not accidental that the "regional defense forces" are wearing the very same uniform which the military forces of the pro-fascist Smetona regime wore.³⁸

In November 1988, commenting on the decision of the Popular Front of Latvia to allocate money to be used to honor Jewish victims of the Holocaust from Latvia, a *Krasnaya Zvezda* correspondent reminded readers that "...as is well known, Latvian Legionaries were also involved in the genocide on

³⁶Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 60.

³⁷V. Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka" [Uniform Out of an Old Trunk], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 14, 1990. Nationalists also come in for criticism for identifying with the military traditions of the regimes of 1918-1920, which actively resisted the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union.

³⁸V. Yarets, "Bezotvetstvennost' Voennoi 'politiki' novogo Litovskogo rukovodstva" (Irresponsibility of the military 'policy' of the new Lithuanian administration), *Voennye Znaniya* (October 1990): 6.

Latvian territory."³⁹ In some ways these comments by Soviet military officers equating the nationalist Balts with fascist Germany seem like preemptive attacks, intended to defuse Baltic criticism that the Soviets are an occupying army. Nevertheless, the Soviet military does remember that the Balts were allied with the "other side" in what they see as the USSR's most important historical struggle.

The truth about Baltic wartime cooperation with the Nazi occupiers is somewhat more complicated than conservative military critics of Baltic nationalism are willing to allow. Although the Balts were initially very supportive of Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union, support for the German occupation regime cooled when it was clear that the Reich had no intention of allowing Baltic independence.⁴⁰ One writer has termed the policy of the Lithuanian populace during the German occupation one of "conditional cooperation", rather than outright collaboration.⁴¹ In any case, Baltic enthusiasm for German policies soon waned in the face of repressive Nazi

³⁹FBIS, Daily Report, (November 29, 1988).

⁴⁰Alex Alexiev, "Soviet Nationalities Under Attack: the World War II Experience," in Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities...*, 67.

⁴¹Suziedelis, "Military Mobilization Campaigns..." The author maintains that, although some Balts did engage in outright collaboration with the Germans, most merely cooperated with the Germans on a conditional basis. Balts were willing to cooperate in activities they saw as supporting the eventual independence of their state. They generally did not engage in those activities which granted authority to the occupier.

policies. By 1943 serious anti-German movements were formed in the Baltic states. Eventually " ... the [Lithuanian] underground press tarred the [German] occupiers with the ultimate insult: The Nazis it was said, were no different from the Bolsheviks."⁴² This, however, was not entirely true. While the Balts had reasons to suspect the Nazis of wanting to deport the populace to the East, the Soviets had actually begun to do so in 1940-41.⁴³ And while the German occupation lasted less than 3 years, the Soviet occupation has continued to this day. When the Balts use the term *occupier*, they primarily have the Soviet Union in mind.

Military officers heatedly contest comparisons of Soviet power with the German occupation regime, implied by the label *occupiers*. They continually point to the *ingratitude* of the Baltic peoples in not recognizing the benign nature of Soviet rule in comparison to the fascist regime of 1941-44.⁴⁴ Pro-military observers continually refer to the term *occupiers* as "insulting" (*oskorbitel'niy*) and offensive. Most military officers consider it ridiculous for them to be compared with the hated fascist-occupiers. In their view, real occupiers live in the best houses, establish their own laws, steal property, and terrorize and kill the citizenry as the Germans did. They do

⁴²*Ibid.*, 39.

⁴³Misiunas and Taagapera, *The Baltic States...*, 68.

⁴⁴Yarets, "Bezotvetsvennost'...", 7.

not see themselves enjoying such "privileges" or involved in such crimes.⁴⁵ Note, for example, this alleged exchange between a Soviet military official and a Lithuanian anti-military demonstrator:

"Hey, you boy...if the Soviet troops were occupiers you wouldn't be standing there for long with your placard."
"Why not?", the other asked, not understanding.
"Because occupiers don't stand on ceremony with 'rebels' like you. You would have been taken off and flogged long ago. I lived through the Hitlerite occupation. I know what it's like."⁴⁶

What this exchange demonstrates is the pervasive hostility that exists between the military and the civil population on an emotional level which is reminiscent of the hostility between the U.S. military and anti-war demonstrators during the Vietnam War.

Liberation: Ingratitude and the Right of Conquest

The theme of ingratitude is one that receives a lot of attention in the Soviet military and Russian-language Baltic press. In short, the Balts are criticized for their lack of

⁴⁵Zinchenko, "Sluzhim v Pribaltike".

⁴⁶FBIS, Daily Report, (May 17, 1989), 75-80. On the Soviets rejecting comparisons with the German occupation regime, see also Sverdlov, "Pomnit Staraya Bashnya" and O. Zinchenko, "Yunoshi Primeryaut Shineli: ob 'Okkupatsionnoi Sindrome', Neustavshchinye i Natsional'noi Aspektye Voinskoi Sluzhby" [Youth Try on Overcoats: on the 'Occupation Syndrome', Non-Regulation Behavior, and National Aspects of Military Service], *Sovetskaya Latvija*, November 11, 1989.

gratitude to the Soviet Union for their liberation from fascist occupation. In rebuking the Balts for their ingratitude, the Soviet military (in countless commemorative articles) recounts the great costs in human lives incurred in the liberation of the Baltic republics from the Nazis. For example:

...isn't it blasphemous to forget about the exploits of those who, without sparing blood and even life itself, saved the Baltic peoples from the yoke of fascist enslavement?⁴⁷

Soviet military officers bemoan the fact that the Balts' "historical memories have turned out to be short."⁴⁸ As the military view themselves as the guardians of the whole Soviet state from external aggression, they express exasperation at the Balts' failure to recognize the military's legitimate role in the region and the greater society: "No other country has such a relationship with its armed defenders."⁴⁹

The emphasis in Soviet military writing on the great costs of the operations to liberate the Baltic suggest a deep-seated attitude that goes beyond exasperation at the Balts' ingratitude. What comes through is the feeling that despite the

⁴⁷V. Sein, "Komu na Ruku 'Antiarmeiskiy Sindrom'?" [Who is Responsible for the 'Anti-Army Syndrome?'], *Sovetskaya Latvya*, July 5, 1989. On ingratitude, see also Sverdlov, "Pomnit Staraya Bashnya," and FBIS, Daily Report, (March 6, 1989), 77-79.

⁴⁸Sverdlov, "Pomnit Staraya Bashnya".

⁴⁹Smirnova, "I Obshie Bedy" [And General Troubles].

attitude of the local population, the Soviets have a right to keep the Baltic simply because they paid such a heavy price in blood for it. This "right of conquest" is never expressed explicitly. Nevertheless, the Russians are conscious of bearing great burdens for the maintenance of the empire, not the least of which were the costs of defeating Hitler and gaining control of a "safety zone" in Eastern Europe. This suggests parallels with other dominant nationalities, which after fighting and suffering to create states, considered it their natural right to dominate the other nationalities. The attitude of the Serbs, who after a century of fighting to create Yugoslavia, felt it their unquestionable right to dominate the non-Serbs in the State, may be another example of this phenomenon.³⁰ It is difficult to determine whether or not this belief actually contributes to Soviet military opposition to Baltic independence. Nevertheless it seems clear that, in general, the military feels that it has far too much invested in the Baltic, both psychologically and economically to simply let it go.

The greatest Soviet victory in this century coincided with the Balts' greatest defeat. While the Soviets emerged victorious in the life-and-death struggle with Nazi Germany, the Balts found themselves once again plunged into the dark night of Soviet occupation. The Soviet military looks at the post-war period as the vindication and consolidation of Soviet power.

³⁰Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe, 1848-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 157.

The Baltic peoples view the same period as a continuation of the battle against domination and occupation by the Russian majority of the Soviet empire.

The "Re-Occupation" of the Baltic States,

1944-1990

The actions which best symbolize the illegitimacy and occupational nature of Soviet power are the harsh series of arrests and deportations that accompanied the reestablishment of Soviet control in the Baltic in 1944-45. The second occupation surpassed the first in ferocity: altogether over 1/2 million Baltic citizens were killed or deported out of a total population of 6 million in the period immediately following the war.⁵¹ The Baltic republics lost about 20% of their population during and immediately following WWII, including those lost to emigration to the west and the 1945 territorial losses.⁵² The harsh regime of terror that was installed in the Baltic after the war was the direct cause of the strong partisan resistance to Soviet rule which lasted until 1953, and

⁵¹Alex Alexiev, *Dissent and Nationalism in the Soviet Baltic* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1983). (Hereafter, *Dissent and Nationalism...*). This includes some 210,000 people deported in connection with the forced collectivization campaigns.

⁵²Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 72-73. Both Latvia and Estonia lost small parts of their territory as a result of the post-war realignments. Lithuania actually gained territory with the addition of Vilnius.

later in some locales.⁵³ Nevertheless, opposition to foreign rule by the Soviet Union has continued, even though coercion and terror have become less and less a part of life in the Baltic as well as the rest of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet policies which have encountered the greatest resistance in the Baltic have been those perceived as aiming at the denationalization and Russification of the region. These policies have been the main target of criticism by the dissident community and the samizdat press.⁵⁴ Russian immigration, forcible conscription of Baltic youth, and the insistence on the use of Russian as the official language have been considered the most oppressive of these policies. Low native birthrates in Latvia and Estonia, accompanied by a program of state-encouraged Russian immigration have confronted these national groups with the perceived threat of imminent biological extinction.⁵⁵ Balts look at the officially sponsored Russian immigration as a form of "demographic warfare", aimed at denationalizing their republics.⁵⁶ Coupled with this has been the continual effort of the central government to increase the use of Russian at the

⁵³*Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁴Alexiev, *Dissent and Nationalism...*, 17 and 37.

⁵⁵Anatol Lieven, "Baltic Notebook," *Encounter* 74 (May 1990): 60-66. See also Wimbush, *Soviet Nationalities...*, 18. Lithuanians have managed to maintain about an 80% majority in their republic, despite Russian immigration, due to a higher average birthrate than Latvia and Estonia.

⁵⁶Alexiev, *Dissent and Nationalism...*, 17.

expense of native languages. This has fueled Baltic beliefs that denationalization is the Soviet central regime's main aim.

From the Baltic perspective, the Soviet military plays a large role in this denationalization policy. Huge military units, made up primarily of non-Baltic servicemen, are stationed throughout the region. Officers bring their wives and children, who fill up the republics' enterprises and schools with non-natives. Most of these "military immigrants", like their Russian civilian counterparts, choose to ignore the republics' native language and culture and expect the hosts to adjust themselves.⁵⁷ Moreover, the military has maintained a strong emphasis on the "internationalization" of Soviet peoples, at least in its rhetoric, based on the military's reliance on a large multinational conscript force. Although the old goal of "sliyane", or merging together of all national groups, has probably been abandoned, the military remains firmly committed to internationalism.⁵⁸ It is the most internationalist of institutions in Soviet society, with a mobile work force of officers who serve in all parts of the Soviet Union and feel that they should be welcome and at home in any part of the

⁵⁷Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States...*, 206. See also I. Joseph Vizulis, *Nations Under Duress: The Baltic States* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), 107.

⁵⁸Alexiev, *Dissent and Nationalism...*, 19.

Union. Many retired Soviet officers, in fact settle down in non-Russian republics, especially in the Baltic where the standard of living is higher than many other parts of the Union.

The "Advanced" Republics Want Out

The post-war re-occupation of the Baltic States, as well as the long period of continuous Soviet rule in the region, has demonstrated another aspect of the clash of national myths and cultures which is at the root of the conflict between the native people and the Russian-dominated military. For the Balts the post-war period is an unmitigated disaster, a nightmare of the national community. For the Soviet military it has been a period of national ascendancy and military security. The economic crisis which prompted the Gorbachev reforms, however, has turned the situation on its head. The Baltic republics have always been considered among the most technologically and economically advanced republics in the Soviet Union. This was not a problem as long as they were harnessed to the economy of the entire Union, and the whole Union benefited from this condition. Lately, however, economic dislocations have accentuated the differences between the republics, leading to recriminations and conflict.

A majority of Balts share the perception that economic shortfalls, especially food shortages are caused by the exploitation of the region by Moscow. The Balts consider themselves as highly skilled and industrious, and view Soviet

domination as the only barrier to their economic prosperity.⁵⁹

The theme of Baltic "superiority", however is a potentially explosive one. Russians are well aware that "subject areas", like the Baltic, are often more well-off than Russia itself. The Balts, in particular, are viewed by Russians with a mix of admiration and resentment. On the one hand, the Balts are admired for their high level of education, technical expertise and discipline. On the other hand they are held in contempt for their arrogance, refusal to speak Russian, and the fact that they seem "too neat, too German-like."⁶⁰ This ambivalent attitude is evident in the military as well. The Soviet military is well aware that many Balts feel they are ruled by inferior "Asiatic Hordes", of which the military is the most visible and potent representative. These insults did not bite so hard when Soviet central authority and military power were ascendant. Now, however, Soviet and Russian confidence in their right and ability to rule has been sapped by painful feelings of inferiority and even shame which the current economic problems have highlighted.⁶¹

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰Alexiev and Wimbush, *Ethnic Minorities in the Red Army...*, 180-181.

⁶¹Lieven, "Baltic Notebook," 62.

Many Russians resent the more advanced economic condition of the Baltic republics. In debates in the Supreme Soviet in 1989 over the granting of economic autonomy to the Baltic Republics (which Gorbachev was in favor of), many Russians attempted to block the move. One pro-reform Russian deputy criticized his colleagues' opposition baldly:

... envious fears lest they grow rich were heard, rather between the Lines. This comes from slavery. For a slave cannot stand it when another slave becomes free and wants him to remain a slave.⁶²

In countless Soviet military articles this tone of resentment toward the Baltic peoples' is apparent. Their pretensions to superiority and their oft-expressed desire to break free of the Soviet empire constitute a direct attack on the right of the Russian majority to rule in an area where they have been dominant for centuries, and which they rule by right of conquest since the victory in the Great Patriotic War. The quest for Baltic independence, however is also a direct blow to the pride of the Soviet military establishment. Given their public statements, it seems unlikely that very many military officers are willing to watch the Baltic States secede and prosper outside Soviet or Russian control.

⁶²FBIS, Daily Report, (July 28, 1989), 40-43.

The Anti-Army Campaign

Nothing has highlighted the Soviet military's true concerns in the present era of reform better than its attacks on the so-called Anti-Army Campaign. Under this general rubric, the military has combined all criticism of its organization, role in society, and way of doing business. Most of all, though, the military views the Anti-Army Campaign as an attempt by opponents of the military to undermine the prestige of the armed forces, its material privileges, and its power over its own destiny. The Anti-Army Campaign represents, in Soviet military eyes, an attempt by the civilian sector of society to exert control over the military and to "demilitarize" Soviet society. In the Soviet Baltic the military has encountered its most extreme and unambiguous challenge, so it is natural that the Anti-Army Campaign here is seen as the most serious and dangerous.

Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies have challenged the preeminent position the military enjoyed in Soviet society. *Perestroika*, or restructuring, undermined the priority the military traditionally enjoyed in the allocation of the nation's resources. The New Thinking (*novoe myshlenie*) in foreign policy resulted in large, unilateral troop cuts and the reduction in nuclear stockpiles. Most important, however, Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, or openness, inaugurated a period of unprecedented civilian criticism of the military institution on a broad scale. The Army came under attack for its "mishandling" of the war in

Afghanistan, the abuse of conscripts fulfilling their military service⁶³, and the April 9, 1989 attack on demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia⁶⁴. In the Baltic, the military has come under the most criticism for its mistreatment of Baltic servicemen and its role as a police organization, as in Tbilisi.

The Soviet military chafes at being the target of so much direct civilian criticism and at being the focus for virtually all anti-Soviet activity:

...every new social organization also considers it "its duty" to express its opinions on the army's problems.
Why?⁶⁵

Military authors continually describe Baltic anti-military actions and slogans as insulting (*oskorblennie*).⁶⁶ In addition, military spokesmen have referred to the tendency towards criticism of the military as a "sickness" of society.

⁶³The practice of older conscripts "hazing" younger recruits is referred to as "dedovshchina", and involves such things as beatings, making junior soldiers act as personal servants to older soldiers, and depriving young recruits of food, etc. It has occasionally included sexual assaults and even murder, and is widely credited with causing the high incidence of suicide among young Soviet conscripts. The military authorities have referred to these practices with the euphemism "neustavshchina", or "non-regulation behavior", and generally downplay their existence.

⁶⁴On April 9, 1989, troops of the Interior Ministry and the army used gas and clubs to attack a protest meeting of thousands of people. Twenty people were killed, mostly women and children, and over 4,000 were injured, many by riot-control gas. *World Almanac of the Soviet Union*, Warren Shaw and David Pryce eds. (New York: World Almanac/Pharos Books, 1990).

⁶⁵Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka."

⁶⁶Yarets, "Bezotvetsvennost'..."

This explains the choice of the word "syndrome", as in "anti-army syndrome" and "occupation syndrome" to describe anti-military sentiments and actions. In an article entitled, "...But What Concerns the Army" [...*A Chto Volnuet Armiu*], the Political officer of the Vilnius garrison, V.I. Kutrovsky, states that the anti-army attitude in the country is due to a sick society. Although he admits that the military has some problems, he insists that the army cannot get healthier until the society as a whole does.⁶⁷

One of the side effects of this "illness" of society, in military eyes, has been a drastic drop in the Army's prestige. The Baltic separatists are explicitly blamed for causing this drop in military prestige in the Baltic Military District because of their protest against Soviet rule and the military presence in the region.⁶⁸ The loss of prestige has directly affected the quality of life of military professionals, and is an obvious source of discontent:

The first thing that must be achieved, is that an officer's service must be honorable and prestigious, not only in word, but in deed ... So that an officer, having received and assignment to the Red Banner Baltic Military District, ... accepts it as an honor.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Smirnova, "A Chto Volnuet Armiu."

⁶⁸Sein, "Komu na Ruku..." At the time of this article's appearance Sein was the Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Baltic Military District.

⁶⁹Zinchenko, "Sluzhim v Pribaltike."

Perhaps the biggest blow to the Army's pride and prestige is the equation of the regular military to a police force; a charge heard often in the Baltic. The regular military considers the functional differences between the forces of internal order, primarily KGB and Ministry of Interior (MVD) troops, and the troops of the Soviet Armed Forces to be very significant.⁷⁰ To civilians in the non-Russian republics on the receiving end of police repression by uniformed troops, these distinctions are probably meaningless. And while it is true that most operations to preserve internal order are carried out by the *non-military* police forces of the MVD, KGB, or militia, most citizens in the Baltic recognize the role of the regular military in supporting, reinforcing and making possible these police actions. That is why, in the wake of the "tragic events" in Tbilisi in April 1989, criticism of the military in the Baltic republics intensified.

The military rejects the role of police force, considering it beneath the dignity of the armed forces. V.I. Kutrovsky (the political officer for the Vilnius garrison) has said explicitly that "The function of the Army is to defend the Socialist Fatherland...The Army must not attack its own people."⁷¹

⁷⁰See Introduction, fn. 4.

⁷¹Smirnova, "A Chto Volnuet Armiu." Kutrovsky's boss, V. Uskhopchik, the Commander of the Vilnius Garrison, was, ironically, the man who ordered the attack on Lithuanian

Responding to criticism of the military in the wake of the incident in Tbilisi, a military author dismissed charges that the Army was involved:

...in my long years of service in the Soviet Army, I have never heard of it being used to break up demonstrations, because it has indeed never been taught to do so. And it has never been intended for this purpose...⁷²

This rejection of the internal role may explain the strong reluctance of officers in regular units to become involved in police actions. In January 1991, the Commander of Soviet Airborne Forces, General-Major P. Grachev, said that in his opinion his troops should not be used to quell inter-ethnic conflicts.⁷³ He stated this, despite the fact that the elite Airborne Forces are the regular army forces most often called upon to back up the Ministry of Interior's troops. Similarly, the Soviet garrison in Liepaja, Latvia, announced in January 1991 that they would not use their arms against the local

separatists occupying the TV tower in downtown Vilnius in January 1991.

⁷²FBIS, Daily Report, (May 17, 1989), 75-80. This statement is disingenuous at best. While the Army certainly does not view riot control and the resolution of ethnic conflicts as part of its "organizational essence", it has taken part in several operations to restore internal order. For example, regular army paratroopers were called into quash anti-government demonstrations in Kaunas in 1972.

⁷³Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (January 7, 1991). Two days later Grachev's troops were called upon to enforce the draft in the Baltic republics.

population.⁷⁴ It is clear from a variety of statements made by military journalists and officials in the Baltic republics that the Soviet Army is very displeased with the police role it has been forced to assume. Nevertheless, the military's frustration seems to be directed primarily at the local population for creating the conditions which make the shouldering of this burden necessary and for simultaneously engaging in continuous agitation against the military.

For many military officers the Baltic independence drives have put at risk an entire way of life in a region which many of them have come to consider home. Service in the Baltic used to be considered a "plum" assignment, due to the higher standard of living there. Many officers chose to stay there after retirement, enjoying the attractive location and the greater availability of consumer goods and food. All of this has changed, however:

Now those in military uniform serving on Baltic territory are in a complex situation ... servicemen cannot help but be concerned about their eroded social status.⁷⁵

This erosion in social status has mainly been the result of discrimination against non-Baltic servicemen on the part of the local Baltic populations. Articles in the Russian-language Baltic press are filled with a regular litany of complaints

⁷⁴Radio Liberty, Daily Report, (January 18, 1991).

⁷⁵A. Riskin, "I Voinu Nuzhna Zashchita" [And Servicemen Need Protection], *Sovietskaya Latvija*, May 24, 1990.

against the Balts for discriminating against servicemen in housing and medical care, and against officers' families in employment and education. The military also charges that the Baltic governments have denied servicemen the special permits needed to shop in the republics' shops, forcing them to rely on what they can get through military channels.⁷⁶ One of the most outspoken critics of the Baltic separatists, Colonel Viktor Alksnis, is himself an ethnic Latvian. Alksnis has accused Baltic nationalists of provoking the Soviet armed forces by making living conditions unbearable:

I am a Lett, but I too have been declared an "occupier" and will be obliged to pay 1500 rubles as a "tribute" to 100% "Aryans" just so that my children can go to a Lettish School.⁷⁷

The issue of discrimination, moreover, has raised the more fundamental issue of who exactly should be considered a citizen of the Baltic republics.

In February and March of 1990 elections were held in the Soviet Union to select the first republican legislatures to be formed after the Communist Party's renunciation of its leading role in society. Prior to those elections much discussion took

⁷⁶The best article on discrimination against servicemen in the Baltic is S. Turchenko, "Sluzhba v Pribaltikye" [Service in the Baltic], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 30, 1990. See also Smirnova, "A Chto Volnuet Armiu"; Zinchenko, "Sluzhim v Pribaltike"; and F. Kuz'min, "Povernut'sya k Delu" [Turning to Business], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 23, 1989.

⁷⁷FBIS, Daily Report, (November 26, 1990), 77. Quoted in U.S. Army Soviet Army Studies Office internal report, "The Empire Strikes Back," unpublished, 1990.

place in the Baltic republics over the question, "Who is a citizen?"⁷⁸ Each of the republics sought to exclude the non-Baltic military personnel in any way it could. The Baltic Popular Front movements viewed the insistence by Moscow that Soviet troops be allowed to take part in the elections as full citizens as a means for undermining the process of democratic change in the region. The primary restrictions which were placed on voting in the Baltic republics were residency requirements. The military complained that these residency requirements effectively disenfranchised servicemen. Conscripts in the region for less than two years, and officers who move frequently from assignment to assignment were unable to meet the residency requirements and were thereby "robbed" of their right to vote.⁷⁹ History has been invoked in this debate as well, with military veterans wondering why those who spilled their blood for the "liberation" of the Baltic republics should be denied citizenship.⁸⁰ The issue of citizenship goes to the root of the conflict between the Baltic republics and the center. The Soviet military, as an institution with its members located in every part of the far-flung Soviet Union, is intent on preserving its full rights wherever its personnel are stationed. Officers don't want to accept the fact that they are considered a foreign military force by those in the peripheral

⁷⁸Zinchenko, "Sluzhim v Pribaltike."

⁷⁹Smirnova, "I Obshie Bedy."

⁸⁰Grigoryan, "Na Rodnoi Zemle."

republics. Colonel Alksnis put it bluntly: "Soviet citizens must feel that they are at home in any part of the country...."⁸¹

Undoubtedly, the most troubling aspect of the Anti-army Campaign for the Soviet military is the prospect of the demilitarization (demilitarizatsia) of Soviet society and the assertion of civilian control over policies which previously fell solely within the military's range of responsibilities. The most obvious example of this is the attempts by governments and popular political groups, in the Baltic and elsewhere, to change the circumstances of military service by members of non-Russian ethnic groups. Before the election of separatist governments in the Baltic republics, military reform proposals consisted mainly of requests that more Baltic conscripts be allowed to fulfill their mandatory military service in the Baltic Military District. There were also calls for the creation of ethnic-territorial military units. The unwillingness of the military command to seriously consider implementing any of these proposals, coupled with an increasingly polarized political situation in the region, resulted in widespread draft evasion by Baltic conscripts. For the citizens of the Baltic republics, draft evasion has been the most obvious and natural form of protest against continued Soviet rule. For the Soviet high-command, however, this form of

⁸¹ FBIS, Daily Report, (August 29, 1989), 39-40.

protest is a direct challenge to the existence of the military as an institution.

As Ellen Jones has noted⁸², reliance on conscription is one of the strongest military traditions in the Soviet Union, predating the revolution. Universal military service provides the Soviet high-command with the means to mobilize huge numbers of conscripts for active service. Moreover, it swells the ranks of Soviet civil society with a large number of citizens who have been exposed to military training, as well as military socialization. This is especially important when considering the multinational nature of the Soviet Union. One of the key goals of universal military service, in the eyes of the Soviet high-command, is to provide non-Russian conscripts with at least a minimum working knowledge of the Russian language. Beyond merely building language skills, however, military leaders look to the 2-3 year enlistment period as an opportunity for "sovietizing" young non-slavic males:

Soviet authorities view the special environment within the military as an opportunity to attenuate competing nationalist loyalties and to instill approved "soviet" values in minority soldiers.⁸³

⁸²This paragraph based on Jones, *Red Army and Society*, Chapter 7.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 196.

In combination with a civilian education system which stresses military themes from a relatively early age⁸⁴, universal military service serves to break down the barriers between military and civil society, giving the military great influence on the society at large.⁸⁵

In principle, Baltic resistance to the draft is based on Article 51 of the 1949 Geneva Convention, which states that citizens of an occupied country cannot be compelled to serve in the armed forces of the occupying power. On August 12, 1989, for example, Vilnius Radio reported that Lithuanian reservists were returning their military service cards to Defense Minister D. Yazov, invoking the provisions of the Convention.⁸⁶ This is strikingly similar to patterns of Baltic resistance to Nazi occupation during the period 1941-44. During the German occupation, the Lithuanians, for example, evaded the draft as the principal means by which to deny the occupiers authority.⁸⁷ Soviet military authorities, however, view local government encouragement and support of draft resistance as much more than a general protest against Soviet central authority in the abstract. They see it as the most provocative and dangerous

⁸⁴See William E. Odom, "The 'Militarization' of Soviet Society," *Problems of Communism*, (September-October 1976).

⁸⁵Jones, *Red Army and Society*, 219.

⁸⁶FBIS, Daily Report, (August 14, 1989), 71-76. See Sverdlov, "Pomnit Staraya Bashnya," for a Soviet view of this claim.

⁸⁷Suziedelis, "Military Mobilization Campaigns...", 36.

challenge to the army's role in society and even to its continued existence. If local governments allow draft evaders to go unpunished, it means a vast restriction in available manpower and the demonstrated inability of the armed forces to compel obedience to Soviet laws which directly affect the military.⁸⁸ It is also the first and most obvious step towards a demilitarization of Soviet society. There is evidence, in fact, that this is exactly what Baltic nationalists have had in mind since the earliest days of *perestroika*: the demilitarization of their homelands.

Even before the election of separatist governments in the Baltic republics, prominent Baltic spokesmen made it clear that their agenda included the "exclusion of militarism" from the institutions of civil society and the subordination of the military to civilian control.⁸⁹ In demanding the full rights of a sovereign republic, the leader of the Estonian Communist Party, A. Ruutel, focused on what he saw as the major problem: "... the army is no longer under the control of the civil authorities, and it is impossible to tolerate this."⁹⁰ Another Estonian leader, I. Toome, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR in 1989, envisioned the creation

⁸⁸Yarets, "Bezotvetsvennost'...", 6.

⁸⁹I. Toome and T. Sil'dam, "Vocem' Predlozhenii po Delam Voennym" [Eight Proposals on Military Affairs], *Sovetskaya Estonia*, April 14, 1989.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

of national-territorial military units as the "first real step towards the limitation of the omnipotence of the army."⁹¹ The identification of the need to "rein-in" the military was, and is not, limited to Estonia. In May 1989, the Baltic Assembly, a group made up of representatives of the Popular Front organizations of the three Baltic republics, in a joint statement demanded that "the relations between the Soviet Army and the civilian population [be revised], and *the army be subjected to civil authority*" (emphasis added).⁹² The assumption of power by separatist governments in the Baltic has only strengthened the desire of the local populations to end the Army's "omnipotence". Refusal to participate in the military's most important institutional practice, universal military service, has been the battleground upon which this fundamental civil-military conflict has been played.

The separatist movements, in the Baltic and elsewhere, which grew out of Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* have created conditions which the majority of military officers find unacceptable. The torrent of historical revisionism and civilian criticism of the military unleashed by the policy of openness has challenged the military's most basic myths about itself and aired its "dirty laundry" for all to see. In the Baltic, servicemen and officers have been treated as

⁹¹Urban, "Mundir iz Starogo Sunduka". See also FBIS, Daily Report, (May 17, 1989), 75-80.

⁹²FBIS, Daily Report, (May 17, 1989), 75-80.

second class citizens deprived of material advantages and political rights. The armed forces have become demoralized as a result of these various pressures.

The military was always a qualified supporter of *perestroika*. The Soviet General Staff supported those elements of the program it found attractive, such as the emphasis on qualitative improvements in industry and greater efficiency in the society as a whole, and generally deemphasized the larger political implications of the reforms. Parts of Gorbachev's program were certainly aimed at restricting and reducing the role of the military in the decision-making processes of government, but the military probably felt compelled to continue to support the central authority. According to the military, things began to get dangerous when the central authority could no longer compel obedience from significant sectors of the population.

The Soviet military views the large-scale evasion of the draft in the secession-minded republics as the clearest challenge to order in society and, ultimately, to the integrity of the Union. While the military establishment is certainly not a monolith of support for Gorbachev's policies, its most influential members are unqualified supporters of the maintenance of order and central authority in the USSR. Military leaders have continually denounced resistance to the draft as a crime, and local governmental legislation sanctioning

draft evasion as "unconstitutional".⁹³ In a highly charged and hostile meeting with Baltic nationalist leaders in December 1989, Defense Minister D. Yazov made it clear that the General Staff's concern over draft evasion in the Baltic was based primarily on principle and not on practical problems brought about by a shortfall in conscripts:

We have letters from conscripts not serving in the Army. The Army is not going to fall apart because of 30-50 people. It [draft evasion] is, however, in violation of the constitution.⁹⁴

The issue of resistance to the draft, however, has greater significance than just the breakdown of order in Soviet society. All of the elements of Soviet military concern over Baltic independence coalesce in this one issue: 1) the large scale draft evasion damages Soviet efforts to man the force and raises the question of Baltic reliability in defense of the Soviet state; 2) the claim that Balts should not be compelled to serve in the army of an "occupying power" is a direct attack on the positive image the military cultivates for itself in connection with the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War; 3) local governmental bodies have chosen to encourage and protect

⁹³FBIS, Daily Report, (December 24, 1990), 80-81. See also M. Ziyemnish, "'Otkazniki' ili Kak na Praktike Viglyadit 'Demilitarizatsia' Latvii" ['Refuseniks'(Draft Evaders) or How to Practically View the 'Demilitarization' of Latvia], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, October 28, 1989.

⁹⁴Kavalauskas, "Litva i Armia..." Of course Yazov was drastically understating the scale of Baltic resistance to the draft. His "30-50 people" was actually many hundreds of people who either evaded the draft or failed to show up for reserve duty. (See Introduction, fn. 1).

draft evaders in part, at least, to establish the principle of civilian control over the military; and 4) the inability of the Soviet government to compel obedience with the laws on universal military service (short of using modern-day "press-gangs") highlights the growing disorder in Soviet society brought about by political paralysis and a crisis of authority. The issue of Baltic independence clearly illustrates that the military will be willing to support only those central political figures who are prepared to maintain order, enforce the law, and maintain the integrity of the union thereby allowing the military to protect its privileged position in Soviet society and its ability to defend the Soviet state from external aggressors.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The situation in the Baltic suggests that the Soviet Armed Forces have made a de facto shift in emphasis from orientation on external threats to a renewed orientation toward internal threats to Soviet security and national (imperial) integrity. In his excellent little book, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1972*,¹ Ken Booth lists the four functions of the Soviet military: 1) the internal functions of security and socialization; 2) the preservation of state interests outside state territory (e.g., Eastern Europe); 3) security of the Homeland (Rodina) against external threat; and 4) advancement of foreign policy. The Soviet military has always viewed the third of these functions as its *raison d'etre*. It has also promoted efforts to protect state interests outside the borders, especially in areas considered vital to Soviet security such as Eastern Europe. It has generally supported military actions to further foreign policy goals only when it felt able to do so, without excessive risk. Senior officers, however, virtually never mention the internal function of the Soviet Military. It

¹Ken Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1972* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1973).

is a job they find beneath their dignity and injurious to their prestige. Nevertheless, under Gorbachev, it has become their main responsibility.

Despite the military's continued reliance on strategic, organizational and ideological arguments in defense of its role as the principal guardian of the Soviet state, the civilian leadership has deemphasized the external threat to the Soviet Union. The New Thinking in foreign policy, the improved relations with the West, and the "retreat" from Eastern Europe, all indicate a nation turning inward, relatively unconcerned about external threats, but preoccupied with problems of internal stability and reform. The use of the military in the Baltic region has given ample evidence of this reorientation in Soviet security policy.

Since the assumption of power by separatist governments in the Baltic republics, interactions between Moscow and the "insurgents" have come to resemble international relations more than domestic struggle. In the past Moscow simply ordered local governments to put down dissent with whatever means necessary. Support from the central government was dispatched if it was needed. Today, however, there are no loyal local governments to maintain Moscow's authority, and it has been forced to rely on the military to rule. Gorbachev has treated the insurgent republics, especially Lithuania, as any head of state would treat another state with which he had a quarrel. Using classic

techniques of "coercive diplomacy", Gorbachev has issued threats, backed up by shows of force and the limited use of military force to intimidate and compel obedience with the center's demands. This strategy was evident in the tense standoff with Lithuania in the Summer of 1990, after the March 11 declaration of independence by the Lithuanian parliament.² It was also evident in the attack on facilities in Vilnius and later, Riga in January, 1991.³ The military has been the chosen "tool of empire", but it has been used sparingly to intimidate and coerce, not to simply impose central rule as Gorbachev has so often threatened.

As this paper has shown, however, the Soviet military is hardly a disinterested and passive instrument in this power struggle. Resistance to Baltic independence is so strong among professional military officers, that it seems likely that the

²On March 11, 1990 the Lithuanian parliament voted unanimously to declare itself fully independent from the Soviet Union. On March 14, the Congress of People's Deputies passed a resolution declaring the Lithuanian declaration illegal. On March 22, tanks rolled through Vilnius, and the Soviet Army set up patrols with armored cars in an obvious show of force. On March 27, Soviet soldiers occupied buildings and beat army deserters. The Soviet Union imposed an economic blockade on Lithuania on April 21, which was only lifted on June 29, after the Lithuanian government agreed to place a moratorium on its independence declaration. *World Almanac of the Soviet Union*, and *New York Times*. January 21, 1991.

³On January 13, 1991, at least 13 people died when Soviet troops assaulted the main television and radio station in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. One week later, special troops from the Soviet Interior Ministry attacked and seized the Latvian Interior Ministry, killing four civilians and wounding eight. *New York Times*. 14, 21 January 1991.

greater the military's influence over Kremlin policy in general, the slimmer the Balts' chances of gaining a significant measure of autonomy from the USSR. The military's influence over national policy in the Soviet Union is a complex topic which does not fall within the realm of this study. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the more threats there are to Soviet security, internal or external, the more the central government will turn to the military for stability, control and the maintenance of central authority.⁴ Moreover, as the central government turns to the military for support in maintaining order, the government will have to address military priorities and not just civilian ones. This trend is suggested by the fact that the most visible military interventions in the Baltic republics have occurred in areas of specific interest to the military: the enforcement of the draft and the challenging of local "militias" which are seen as usurping the military's traditional role.⁵

⁴I do not mean to imply that the West should refrain from pressuring the Soviet Union on the topic of Baltic independence just to reduce the Soviets' perception of an external threat. On the contrary, continued pressure from the West, especially the U.S., has more than likely played a role in restraining the Gorbachev government from taking more decisive and brutal measures to subjugate the Baltic republics. I do argue, however, that the greater perception there is of an actual external threat to Soviet security, the higher the priority that will be given to security matters and therefore the greater the influence of the military-industrial complex (*Voенно-Промышленный Комплекс* or VPK) on the formation of policy.

⁵In March 1991, when the Army participated in Gorbachev's campaign of pressure against Lithuania, soldiers beat army deserters (See fn. 2). In Riga, January 1991, the MVD troops

The Soviet military's influence on Kremlin policy, and with it the fate of Baltic aspirations for independence, also depends to some degree on the international and regional security environment. If the current trend of improving relations with the West continues, it is conceivable that the military's influence could erode. Likewise, if relations should worsen with the West, the military's influence in Soviet society may grow, with the associated worsening of conditions for Baltic separatists. This points to an enduring truth of Baltic history: that the fate of these three small states, perched precariously on the coast of their great Russian neighbor, will probably be decided elsewhere. The future of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia will most likely depend more on what happens in Moscow, Washington, Paris and London, than on what happens in Vilnius, Riga, or Tallin.

attacked the Latvian Ministry of the Interior which had declared itself independent from the all-Union ministry and had set up an alternate police force (See fn. 3). Likewise, the pretext for sending troops (paratroopers) into Lithuania in January 1991, was to enforce the draft (See Section III, fn. 71).

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